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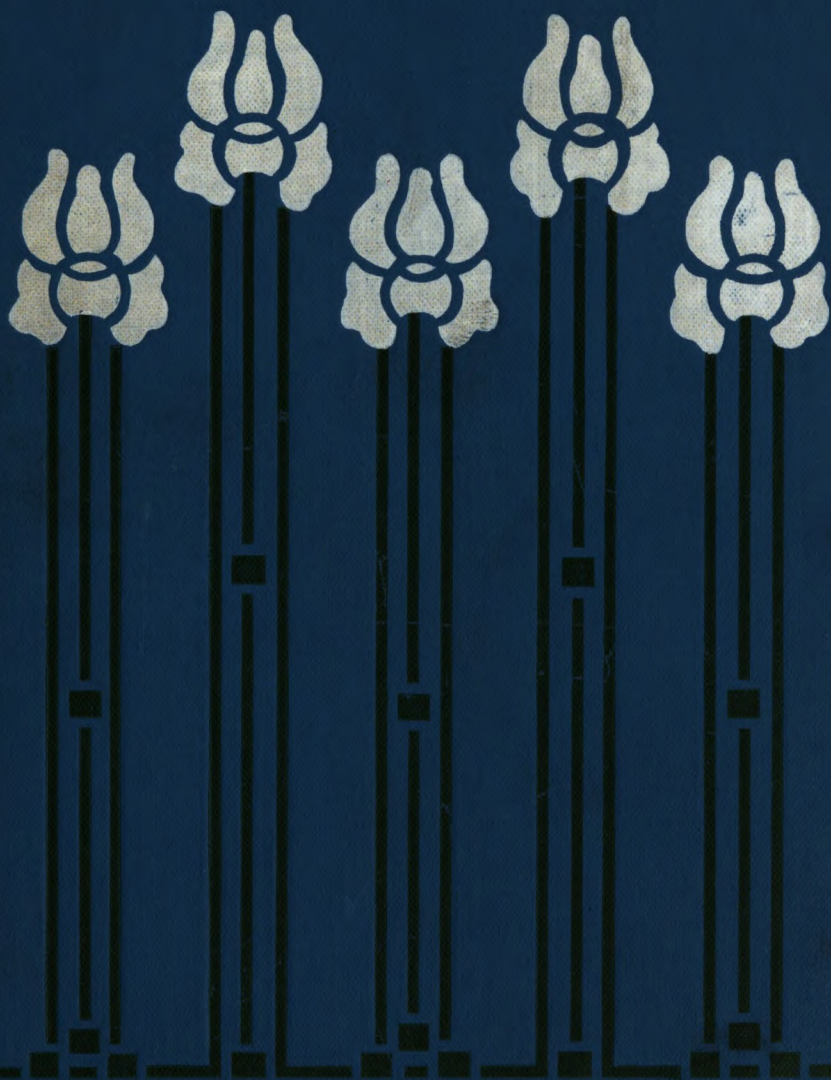
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# PROBATION



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MARIA LONGWORTH STODER







# PROBATION

BY

MARIA LONGWORTH STORER

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***Joseph Gummersbach***

## PREFACE

This story is written with the special desire to point out the dangers that threaten our Nation from the persistent and ruthless attempts at a "social readjustment" which shall be erected upon the ruins of Christian civilization.

By placing the scene of my story in the old world as well as the new, and with characters belonging to different races intertwined in a somewhat fantastic tale, I have tried to show that Religion and Morality mean exactly the same things in every country and for all time! By describing facts, all taken from real life in conspicuous places, I have hoped to call attention to the evils let loose in America to-day, and to arouse all true patriots to fight for the welfare of our country. Only those who are faithful to the past can save the future.

Our American nation is unique. Unlike the nations of Europe, it has neither Fatherland nor Motherland. The Declaration of Independence separated us from our "Mother England" and the new Nation sprang into life and strength full grown. It was dedicated by General Washington to "the Divine Founder of our blessed religion,



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without a humble imitation of Whose virtues we can never hope to be a happy nation."

Many of the *new* American patriots who scorn "traditions" and "dogmas" may never have read or else have forgotten General Washington's farewell address. I will quote two sentences:

"Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism who should labour to subvert these great Pillars of human happiness — these firmest props of the duties of Men and Citizens."

It is not only to America that these words apply, but to every Christian government on earth and for all time! More than sixty years ago, Balzac warned his own people in almost the same words; he said:

"Religion and Justice, those two great pillars, *without which no social order can be upheld*, have grown weaker in France during our nineteenth century, which boasts so loudly of its 'progress' in every direction."

One wonders, looking about in the American world of the twentieth century, what has become of that great pillar "Religion," without which Morality cannot be upheld?

General Washington also tells us that "*Reason and Experience* both forbid us to expect that na-

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tional morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."

Protestantism is drifting toward an "illimitable ocean" of doubt and denial. The hope of the Christian world is centred in the Catholic Church, the Mother of all Christendom; because, as Monsignor Benson has said: "The stability of all Society, the one safeguard against anarchism, the one protector of domestic life, the one inspirer of art, the one competent adversary of race suicide, has lain in the past, and will lie in the future, in the Catholic Church and the Catholic Church only."

MARIA LONGWORTH STORER.

Rome, March 25th, 1915.



# PROBATION

## CHAPTER I

**A**T sunset on a day early in June, 1912, the fast train was speeding over the Brenner railway on its way north from Verona. It had just passed the station at Brenner-Bad, and Innsbruck was scarcely an hour away.

In a first-class carriage, labelled, "*Rauch-Coupé*," two men sat smoking. One of them, very thin, with long legs crossed in front of him, sat leaning backward while he talked. Every movement suggested the smooth and alert grace of a panther, and the hand that held his cigarette was long and slim, an ancient Greek intaglio gleaming almost like a clot of blood against the whiteness of a slender finger. His hand alone would fix the attention of any one interested in studying character from outside appearances. Poet, artist, musician, might be obvious conclusions: the latter inferred from the sinews of steel which showed beneath a skin smooth as ivory, at each swift gesture—and he made many. But his hands suggested tenacity as well, in the claw-like grip with which he held so frail and unimportant a thing as a cigarette: and there was

nervous vitality in the flick of the ashes into a clumsy little brass tray lying on the table-shelf between the windows.

This traveller's face was especially beautiful seen in profile: the nose long and delicately shaped, the chin sharp enough for decision, but rounded in a graceful curve that joined it to a neck, straight, white and smooth as a woman's, with no suggestion of the masculine Adam's apple.

A small black moustache, waxed at the ends and turning upwards, showed only a thin pink line of underlip, and a gleam of white and even teeth when he spoke or smiled. His brow was very high and narrow, accentuated by its frame of jet black hair of fine texture, trimmed "*en brosse*," and the eyebrows were distinctly pencilled like delicate feathers, also jet black. He was dressed in dark blue flannels, with a striped shirt and silk tie of lighter blue and white. Against the lapel of his coat two white jasmine stars drooped and twinkled above a sprig of their waxy green leaves. A Panama hat was in the net above his head. In age he might be forty.

I have taken so long to describe him, because any one, at first sight, would have looked long at this man, taking in every detail of his face and dress. He was an arresting personality, whether attractive or repellent one could hardly say. At any rate, that is what his present companion felt, as he took

a long look at him during a pause in the conversation. Both men had been gazing through the open window at the purple line of mountains, cut sharp against the sky of molten gold fading upwards into a pale daffodil, which, toward the zenith, melted away in a shimmering sea of vivid peacock green.

"How beautiful!" murmured the elder traveller, half closing his white eyelids and dropping a partly smoked cigarette into the ash-tray: "one really ought not to do anything carnal in the presence of such an exquisite joy to the eye!"

"It is certainly beautiful," rejoined the other, appreciative but more rational, still keeping his cigarette alight. He was at least five years younger than his companion, and looked ten. Certainly, he could not be over thirty-five, and was of that blond and blue-eyed type which always makes both men and women appear to be younger than their age.

The two men were strangers to each other, but had fallen into conversation easily as well-bred persons of every race can do. They were speaking English, the elder man without a fault of grammar but with just a trace of foreign accent.

The talk had turned upon European politics, in view of the perpetually recurrent trouble in the Balkans, and the belligerent attitude of Turkey. The younger traveller, happening to make a rather severely critical remark as to the intentions of England:

"You are not an Englishman, then?" the elder asked in obvious surprise.

"I am an American — and I may add, a Bostonian," replied the blond young man, smiling.

His companion looked him up and down with black and glittering eyes, which, as features, would have appeared to better advantage had they been set a little farther apart.

"You look more like an Englishman!" he exclaimed when the scrutiny was over, and he had taken note of the young man's tall, rather narrow-shouldered but muscular figure, clad loosely in a faultless British travelling-suit of light gray: and of a classic head, with a thick crop of quite golden hair, closely trimmed and carefully parted on the right side; framing a faintly florid face, with a delicate skin, clean shaven; a prominent aquiline nose; a thin-lipped and finely chiselled mouth, and a resolute chin. Altogether a very handsome and unusual young man.

"You look more like an Englishman," the elder man repeated, "and you speak *English* without the proverbial 'twang.' I hope you don't mind my saying this," he added.

"I am quite accustomed to the same meant-to-be flattering observation from others beside yourself," rejoined his companion. "It comes usually without any apology and from English people."

"Of course you know what I mean," his companion pursued, "I should not have given utterance to my thought did I not feel sure that all well-bred Americans must suffer quite as much as the whole world over here suffers, from the noise and swagger of that travelling horde of compatriots who call themselves 'Murrican,' and who seem to be a product of your great country's commercial prosperity."

The younger traveller laughed.

"My own nerves," he said, "are so sensitive on this very subject that I habitually, when stopping over at any place unknown to me, avoid scrupulously the hotels starred by Baedeker, even at the risk of some lack of modern luxury, or even of cleanliness: and I generally find in return, simple folk and better cooking. The fact is, I was just now wondering where to put up at Innsbruck. It is only for the night, as I am going on to Munich to-morrow; but one of the worst meals I have ever had in Europe was a luncheon at the time-honored Tiroler-Hof (now the swarming-place for motor-tourists) last autumn on my way to Italy, where I spent the winter and spring."

The elder man seemed amused at the stream of information, more naïf than his appearance suggested, which was poured out by the handsome young stranger; and as he smiled his thin white nose came down and his black waxed moustache went up,



quite suggestive of Monsieur Rigaud, but of a high-bred and refined Rigaud: swifter, surer, and perhaps more dangerous.

The streak of childlike innocence which had revealed itself in the character of the young American prevented his noticing the suggestive facial tricks of his neighbour. To him, this well-bred man of the world was very civil and evidently anxious to be friendly: nothing more. And the "foreigner," when his smile relaxed, was all of this: and, on the surface, nothing else.

"Why may not I have the pleasure of your company to-night?" he asked. "I live at Schloss Greifenstein. We descend in five minutes at Matri, twenty kilometres from Innsbruck. I am just returning from Venice. I can send you to the station at Innsbruck to-morrow to catch any train you like for Munich. What do you say?"

"You are most kind," stammered the young American, quite taken aback by the other's unexpected hospitality: especially unforeseen in an Austrian, "but I have my servant in the second class, and my trunks are checked through to Munich. Although, to be sure," he added, "my dinner things and all I need for the night are in the valise above my head."

"My man is also on the train," his companion hastened to answer, "the two have probably already made acquaintance: and as for the baggage and your

servant, a wagon is coming for my own things quite big enough for all, as well as the motor-car. My servant drives in the wagon, yours rides beside my chauffeur. We two shall have plenty of room on the inside (it is a limousine) *et nous voilà!* I beg you to take pity upon my loneliness."

Quite bewildered by his would-be host's amiable insistence the young American faltered: "You are really too kind; of course I accept with pleasure."

Five minutes later the two gentlemen and their servants were the only passengers leaving the train at Matrei.

The sunset light had died away. The after-glow had faded to a dull pink, which turned to ashen violet behind the cold barrier of the Martinswand, and one star trembled dimly in the sky. Toward the east a pale moon had just swung out from behind the distant mountain peaks: and a soft veil of shimmering silver spread slowly across the wide valley, where the mist, like a phantom host, surged upward from the winding river, and the breath of the night-wind seemed to whisper tales of enchantment, dim and fantastic.

## CHAPTER II

**O**UTSIDE the station the travellers found a motor-car awaiting them: already panting as if in impatience to be gone. The pale man motioned his guest to climb in and, following immediately, seated himself beside him. The two valets came next with the hand baggage, and a second servant piloted a porter, carrying a trunk through the gate, to a waiting wagon. The American's servant who had been extracted from the train quite dazed at the sudden change of plans, was deposited beside the chauffeur. As the train moved away, the automobile shot out into a highway, the wagon clattering behind it.

They drove first through the long straggling street of a village of small and scattered houses, and then plunged into the dim gold of the twilight along a narrow country road, where the lighted lamps of the motor-car poured forth dazzling streams of light upon shadowy rocks and trees that flashed past and disappeared, like a ghostly procession flying in the opposite direction, as though frightened at what they had left behind.

Not until this moment did the bewildered guest find an opportunity to say to his host:

"You have not even asked my name." He was too polite to add: "And I do not know yours," but his host himself rejoined quickly:

"And it never occurred to me that you would not have guessed mine. Everybody knows Greifenstein. The fact is, however, that I care so little for etiquette and conventionality that names mean very little to me."

The younger man bowed his head and announced a little stiffly: "My name most likely means nothing to you, but at the same time permit me to tell you who I am." And then after a short pause: "I am Reginald Grafton of Boston," he said: "my father, who died six years ago, was the head of the well known banking firm of Grafton & Wilkinson."

The thin face of the pale man beamed with obvious satisfaction as the light of the electric lamp fell from above full upon it. He had taken off his hat and was leaning back against the luxurious tufted cushions of the limousine.

"I have heard of that firm," he said, "I have lived a good deal in London. An only son?"

"An only child."

The pale gentleman's eyes glittered and his smile was still more beaming:

"And now," he said, "let me tell you my name. I am Count Roman Goritzki."

The young man started as if he had been shot.

"Count Roman Goritzki!" he repeated in a shocked voice.

"H'm!" murmured the Count smiling with shut lips; "so you have heard of me before? Yes, I am the 'Diva's' husband; or rather, I was."

With a strong effort Reginald Grafton reduced his amazement to mere polite surprise.

"Of course," he said, "every one knows the greatest actress living, Leonora Bardi, and that her name is Countess Goritzka.

"There is no doubt about her acting," rejoined the Count. "If you please we shall change the subject."

They proceeded quite in silence for a while, the Count lost in thought and Reginald Grafton in wonder.

Meanwhile the car had begun to climb upward along a steep and zigzag road; now skirting the edge of a precipice, now losing itself in a forest of tall firs and larches. Looking out of the window, Reginald descried far above, shining like silver in the moonlight, an ancient castle, dominated by a huge square dungeon-tower. It was perched upon a height at the edge of a cliff which, as he noticed, must descend in a sheer wall of rock down to the village which they had passed half an hour before. In front of the castle was a wide, level space toward which the motor was climbing, and as it twisted upward Reginald Grafton caught glimpses of thickly

wooded mountains rising higher still above the castle on the side farthest away from the valley; and finally, above and behind the dark mass of the forest, the jagged ridges and peaks of bare rock cut like a silver saw against the deep blue of the sky.

Again Reginald felt that he was in fairyland and that no fantastic or fabulous creature that might appear before his eyes could surprise him; whether giant, dwarf, imp, nymph or fairy. He turned to his host expressing his wonder and admiration. The strain of a moment before became relaxed and the two men began once more to talk easily and gaily. A few minutes later the motor swung around with a grating of sand and gravel upon a wide terrace and drew up before an open door in the great square dungeon-tower. There was a portico in front with stone pillars and five broad stone steps.

"Incongruous but convenient, like our more modern luxuries: baths, electric light and automobiles," remarked the Count.

They entered the open door, coming suddenly into a blaze of light, and Reginald Grafton held his breath in astonishment. The whole inside of the tower was one vast hall from floor to roof, four stories high. There were galleries running around it at each story with carved wooden railings of old oak, connected with each other by a stone staircase. Arched doorways opened upon these galleries con-

ducting to the other buildings of the castle. The doors were of massive oak studded with iron nails.

It was a lordly waste of room ; for Reginald Grafton noticed there was not in the whole space a spot where anybody might sit in comfort. Near to the front door were placed against the grey stuccoed walls a few ancient wooden armchairs with leather seats, and two heavy carved chests. There was no other furniture. In startling contrast to this rough mediæval interior was the blaze of electric lights, with modern glass shades, pink and white, planted at intervals in girandoles along the walls below and on the four sides of each gallery above.

"They have made an illumination in your honour. This does not happen every night," laughed Count Goritzki. "My servant telephoned from the station that a guest of distinction was accompanying me. And now, dear Mr. Grafton, let me conduct you to your apartment."

As he spoke the Count led the way up the stone stairway to the first gallery. Here he threw open a heavy oaken door and disclosed an open colonnade or loggia of graceful Italian sculpture, looking down upon a long quadrangular courtyard in the interior of the castle. Below them in the moonlight lay a shadowy garden with delicate shrubs and flowers, and in the centre a fountain playing.

"It really is quite pretty and rather surprising,"

murmured Count Goritzki, standing at Reginald Grafton's elbow.

"It was the fancy of an eighteenth century ancestor of mine to bring a scrap of Italy up into this rugged spot. This part of the castle is only habitable in the spring and summer. The winter rooms are downstairs and in the western wing. However, nobody comes here often at any season now. I can't afford my great hunting-parties any longer."

These words, spoken in a bitter tone, came as a flash of surprise to Reginald Grafton. His new acquaintance had given hitherto the impression of a Monte-Cristo.

Count Goritzki opened a door on the inside of the arcade.

"Here is your room," he said; "and your man, with the bags, has already been conducted to your dressing-room next door. We shall have supper in about a half-hour. I expect you to be as ready for it as I am. *Bon appétit!*"

When Reginald Grafton was left alone he barely glanced at his modern bedroom with its two case-ment windows opening on the arcade, hung with chintz curtains of coquettish design (Louis XVI rose-wreaths and blue ribbons), nor did he notice the soft coloured prints against a pale pink wall and the wide armchairs inviting occupancy.

He walked up and down with his head in his hands.



“By Jove!” he exclaimed. “I must never tell the Signora! However could it have happened?”

Then he opened the door leading into the dressing-room where everything was already laid out and prepared for his toilet.

### CHAPTER III

A HALF hour later Reginald Grafton, dressed and quite eager for his supper, was beginning to wonder where the dining-room might be, when a discreet knock sounded upon the door of his bedroom. Outside stood a servant in livery who, preceding Reginald, led him down the flight of stone stairs by which he had come up. In the wall to the right of the front entrance on the southern side of the big square tower was a wide stone archway closed by a massive door with wrought iron hinges that wandered in skilfully fashioned scroll-work over the brown oak panels, and fastened by a heavy latch of the same wrought iron. Lifting it the man pushed open the door, which swung inwards, and then stepped back for Reginald to pass before him, murmuring: "*Ich bitte sehr.*"

The opened door revealed a vast oblong room with a deep embrasure on one side. A huge globe of opalescent Bohemian glass swung by a chain from a heavy oaken beam in the ceiling. Within it was a group of powerful electric lights that blazed forth in every direction, illuminating the farthest corner of the salon. In the recess, which was as

big as an ordinary sitting-room, an electric lamp, not lighted, stood ready for use on the open shelf of a carved oak writing-desk, covered with a litter of papers. On the wall opposite was hung a magnificent tapestry. It was frayed here and there but the moth's corruption had wrought no serious havoc. Noah and his family, including a wife with a decided goitre, still knelt conspicuously in the foreground, giving thanks with upturned faces, and clad in rich robes, purple, crimson and deep yellow, through which gold threads gleamed here and there in an intricate damask pattern. The dark ribs of the ark stood out in the middle distance against a group of pale green trees and a sheet of grey-blue water. Elephants browsed among the low-hanging boughs and birds roosted in the upper branches; while, nearer to the foreground, camels, lions, leopards and giraffes disported themselves in fields of yellow green. The border on each side was a tangle of rocks, grass and flowers, intermingled with lions, goats, monkeys and even rabbits, all of about the same size.

In the centre of the border across the top a large dove spread its wings, an olive branch in its beak; while soberly tinted peacocks in profile, trailed their tails on either side. The border below was wider. Neptune drove his chariot of sea-horses in the centre; on either hand a horde of admiring mermaids, shell-blowing tritons and dancing dolphins.

Against this tapestry stood a high and shallow cabinet with glass doors and a glass back. It had three shelves each filled with guns and pistols, ranged in wooden racks one above the other. On the floor of the cabinet were scattered daggers, hunting-knives and powder-flasks of beautiful workmanship.

Reginald Grafton had time to observe all these things for he was alone in the room. He loved everything old and beautiful, and he loved intelligently. He had stooped to examine more closely an extraordinary gold arabesque design upon the stock and barrel of one long oriental gun, and also the curious carving of another just beneath it (a strange subject for a firearm) representing a stout ivory Venus newly risen from a stiffly rippling ivory sea when the farther door opened and his host entered hastily.

"A thousand pardons," Goritzki exclaimed as he crossed the floor of bare, clean, unwaxed boards, covered here and there by time-worn oriental rugs. "I was detained by my old friend and servant the 'Ober Förster,' or Head Forester, who is also my steward; and is indeed really master here. He had some rather important matters to speak about to me."

The Count seemed worried and nervous, but was still charming in his friendliness. His evening dress was very becoming; for he was one of those

aristocrats who can never be mistaken for a waiter ; and such indubitable gentlemen always look their best in plain black with a white tie, even better than in the magnificence of a glittering uniform where the personality is lost sight of and a lay figure would do just as well to display the merely official nobility of clothes. Indeed, one may say that two singularly handsome men entered the adjoining banquet-hall when dinner was announced five minutes later.

This room also was magnificent in size, with two large arched windows at the farther end cut through walls nearly three metres thick, but as to furniture it was primitive and bare compared to the one they had just left. Stag-heads crowned by huge antlers hung upon the walls with inscriptions as to the killer and the killing, and here and there an ancient portrait, almost indistinguishable, blinked at the decadence of modern fashions. In a corner at either end was a huge stove of *faience* (supported by four lions), having panels in bas relief covered with coloured majolica glaze. The stove at the nearer end depicted the four seasons. A stout and grape-crowned Bacchus (the most important panel on the front) represented Autumn. Above him in a smaller panel an old man with a long beard, as Winter, was trying to warm his cold hands over some wavy rose-coloured flames. Summer and Spring were on each of the sides: two stout young

women, one crowned with roses, the other with ears of wheat.

"That is very rare and very old; one of the finest and largest stoves that I know of anywhere," Goritzki said as they sat down.

There was no long festive board in the banquet hall and only a few old carved chairs against the walls at wide intervals. A small round dining-table of mahogany stood at the end near to the door by which they had entered. The two chairs placed at it opposite to each other were modern and comfortable, and covered with dark red leather. In the centre of the table was an electric lamp with a pink silk shade, the wire running over the white table-cloth and disappearing beneath it like the lamps at a restaurant.

"We don't bother to have candles now," explained the Count, "and the big table is stowed away."

A small swinging green baize door led into the pantry. There was no *maitre d'hôtel* in black, but the meal was well served by two men in livery, one of whom Reginald had already seen. The two were so exactly alike that if they had not appeared simultaneously now and then, he would have sworn that the same individual came and went through the swinging doors. They had very good-natured, pleasant faces, with snub noses and wide mouths,

narrow foreheads and yellow hair, short and stiff. Reginald Grafton felt sure that the hands concealed by white thread gloves were red and rough with plough and harvest work, but they performed their service at the table well and even gracefully.

“You are noticing my two Dromios,” the Count remarked, “they are twin sons of the old Head Forester, the father of an enormous family; six sons and four daughters. As I told you, he is really the master here: but he has fine old feudal notions about his progeny, they are all sworn slaves of the ‘Erlaucht’ (myself). The children all live at Greifenstein except two sons, one of whom was adopted by an aunt and the other has a place in the bank at Innsbruck. In days of departed glory my two Dromios were trained by the *maître d’hôtel* whom I now keep in my Venetian palazetto (it is no longer worth while to bring him to Greifenstein). The elder daughter was carefully instructed as a *cuisinière* by my French chef, alas, no longer in my service. She, however, is an excellent cook, as this *petit souper* testifies. Another son is my chauffeur and the remaining one is under-forester to his father.

“The other daughters and the mother look after all the household work when I am here, which I grieve to say is not often or for a long stay during late years. And so, my dear Mr. Grafton, you have now a detailed account of this worthy family and in-

cidentally of my circumstances, frankly told. I drink to the health of my guest and to future pleasant meetings."

Goritzki raised aloft an exquisite Venetian glass goblet, much too large to be intended for champagne, but filled to the brim with that lively liquid. He tossed off more than half of it at one gulp, *à la Russe*. Reginald Grafton raised another beaker of quivering gold-shot opal (which he had only allowed to be half-filled) to his fine thin lips, and took a leisurely draught, appreciating the fact that the wine was *brut* and *frappé* to a turn, and he wondered in his mind whether his graceful host were not of too convivial habits. His pale face certainly gave no indication of it.

With the same apparent frankness with regard to his own personality (which Goritzki's tongue asserted but his eyes belied) the Polish gentleman cried out, seeming to answer Reginald's thoughts as he put down his empty glass:

"That, my friend, would be my ruling passion had I not another which leaves no room for any mistress but herself. To tell you the real truth my *grande passion*, the lady I adore, is Play. Of course, I should not need to tell you this had you ever lived in Vienna or in Budapest or" — and the Count's eyes glittered — "if perchance you sometimes go to Monte Carlo."

Reginald maintained upon his lips the required



smile of a courteous guest, but behind his blue eyes he was thinking to himself:

"Poor Leonora! This then is what came between her and happiness; wrecked her life and gave 'La Bardi' to the stage." Then, as he looked at Goritzki, Reginald Grafton, who was good nature itself and was moreover accustomed with the ease of heathen tolerance to condone everything and to look even upon crime as only a disease, sporadic or hereditary, began to make allowances for his brilliant host.

The Count was rather dashing and reckless by his own admission, but a man like that is his own worst enemy. He was evidently open-hearted and well meaning. The whole thing was "a pity" and should not be ruthlessly condemned.

So Reginald Grafton raised to his lips the shimmering opal goblet and drank a longer draught.

"Health and luck!" he said smiling.

When the meal was over, which had been much more a dinner than a *petit souper*, ending with ices and fruits (late oranges and early peaches heaped together), Goritzki took out his watch:

"Eleven and ten minutes," he announced. "We shall have coffee and cigars in my den and if you are not an early bird, perhaps a game or two of cards?"

The Count's eyes were wistful and he added persuasively: "The best train to Munich leaves Innsbruck at two o'clock to-morrow afternoon."

## CHAPTER IV

**R**EGINALD GRAFTON was a very rich man and could afford luxuries. He never played cards for stakes at home because he did not like the class of American men who gamble and still less the women of that type. Abroad, where the whole world plays for *something*, and the reasonable woman as well as man knows when and where to stop, it seems quite an excusable diversion, no more a vice than that the person who can afford it should spend money upon any other luxury. It seems as wide a difference as between taking one's glass of wine at dinner and rolling in the gutter dead drunk.

This, at any rate, was Reginald Grafton's view of the matter, and he remembered that he had in his pocket at that very moment a roll of English bank-notes which he always carried about with him when travelling on the Continent. So he answered genially:

"I shall be delighted to play with you if there be any game for two which I know well enough."

"Poker is the game I like best but it is no good for two. How about piquet?" asked Goritzki.

"I dare say I can play that well enough," responded Reginald; "I used to play a good deal with my mother who is quite deaf."

The Count's moustache went up in an amused smile as he fetched a card-table from against the wall.

"Clear away!" he ordered one of the Dromios in German, pointing to the coffee-tray. Then he beckoned to the servant to come nearer and said something in a lower tone, of which Reginald caught the concluding words: "*Um ein Uhr.*"

"You speak German?" Goritzki asked as they sat down and he began to shuffle the cards with swift and skilful white fingers.

"A little — enough for travelling," replied Reginald, "but I read a great deal, especially the German of my boyhood, Goethe and Schiller and Heine."

"A poet?" Goritzki asked with a slight grimace.

"Only a lover of poetry and music, of colour and form," corrected Reginald.

"Then you travel so much only for pleasure?"

"To kill time and to enjoy life my own way," the American sybarite answered. "I am not a 'sport,' I am shamefully rich and I don't want to be idle."

Goritzki's pale face flushed and glowed. He looked ten years younger in the twinkling of an eye.

"A pound a point!" he cried, and then proceeded

to explain. "I play usually in London at a club," he finished vaguely.

To say that Reginald Grafton was startled is putting it mildly.

"I don't quite understand," he faltered. Goritzki went into details.

"We play six hands (as it is getting late one set will probably be all we shall have time for). At the end of six hands or deals we count up, each of us, our points. The difference goes to the winner."

"Oh, yes, I see," said Reginald, feeling rather relieved. "If I have a hundred and forty points and you have a hundred and fifty you win ten pounds."

"Precisely. But if you should be 'rubiconed,' that is, if you (or I), at the end, have scored less than a hundred points, you pay, or I pay, not only the difference between us but also the entire number of points gained by the loser. Do you see?"

"Oh, yes, I think I do," responded Reginald and then he pursued courageously: "Let us hope that nobody will be 'rubiconed.'"

But Reginald Grafton discovered that the game of piquet which he was now experiencing was a very different thing from the harmless amusement of a deaf mamma in Boston. Goritzki played piquet with marvellous skill, appearing to calculate chances unerringly. The six hands were finished in less than an hour and the young American found that

he had been "rubiconed" most cleverly. He had scored only ninety points to Goritzki's two hundred.

At the vision of two hundred pounds vanished and gone in an hour's amusement, Reginald Grafton looked rather aghast, but as far as the money was concerned he could afford it.

Goritzki was all smiles: "You wished me luck in that glass of champagne," he beamed, "but really, you know, I feel quite ashamed of my success."

"It is all right," Reginald protested a trifle stiffly. "It is all the fortune of war."

"You play very well," Goritzki rejoined magnanimously. "It is after all a question of luck."

"I don't know about that. It is much more of a game than I thought it was. And now allow me to pay my honest debts."

Assuming the air of a man of the world which, in truth, he was not, Reginald Grafton drew forth from his trousers pocket a flat wallet of leather, and counted out upon the table four bank-notes for fifty pounds each.

"You are most welcome to them, my kind host," he said with true American generosity.

Goritzki observed that the young man had still a lot of bank-notes in the wallet which he replaced in his pocket.

"My dear friend, I myself could ill afford to lose just now," the Count declared in a burst of what

he called frankness and which savored a little of bravado; "to tell you the truth, I have been fearfully hard up these last two years: ever since a memorable night at the Country Club in Budapest. I go no more to Hungary. There, play runs too high, my word for it. A whole fortune may be lost or won in a single night. I myself came forth quite ruined as far as ready money goes. Of course the estate is what is called 'safe' from such owners as I, being strictly entailed. But (more's the pity) failing any direct Goritzki heir, it reverts to the family of Greifenstein; and I have no son. However, I did not mean to bore you with my private affairs and grievances: only to assure you that your misfortune has really been a boon to me and also I wish to inform you (for I do not look upon you as a stranger, dear Mr. Grafton) that there is a prospect before me now of a really golden future. Who knows but when you return next year, as you must promise to do, it may already have been realized? In any event, you will come again even if it be only to find me in the usual penury of to-day, will you not?"

Without waiting for an answer from Reginald, Goritzki glided across the room to a grand piano in the farther corner which had a Cordova leather screen in front of it, hiding the ugly case. The lid was open and Goritzki, placing the bank-notes in front of him on the music-stand, sat down, with

his long legs stretched out past the pedals, ran his fingers up and down in harp-like arpeggios and then suddenly burst forth in a marvellous tenor with the "*Il mio tesoro*," from *Don Giovanni*, addressing the bank-notes in fantastic devotion, but singing with an art of tone and phrasing such as one seldom hears now on the modern stage where vocalization has given place to strenuosity.

It was old-fashioned and exquisite. Reginald Grafton sat down in a chair to listen, gasping with pleasure. He now understood La Bardi's *folie de jeunesse*, her marriage with Goritzki. Whatever seemed fantastic and uncanny about him to-day must have appeared in his youth to be a playful fascination.

With such a golden voice added to so much beauty and lithe grace, how could he have failed to capture the heart of a beautiful Italian girl on fire with poetry and emotion such as Leonora Bardi must have been? Reginald understood it all perfectly now, but he muttered again to himself as he saw the bank-notes quiver on the music-stand under the ardent breath of Goritzki: "By Jove! I must never tell the Signora — nor the Princess Olga either," he added.

Goritzki whirled about on the piano-stool as he finished the song, sweeping away the bank-notes with his slim right hand, and waving them as he came forward.

"How do you like '*Il mio tesoro*'?" he asked.

"Wonderful!"

"I thought once of singing in opera but I was too lazy to try to be a second Mario."

After saying good night and arranging to breakfast together next morning at ten o'clock, Reginald went slowly up the stone stairway and into the arcade outside which overlooked the garden and upon which his bedroom and dressing-room doors opened.

The courtyard bathed in moonlight was like an Arabian night's dream. The Italian structure had been built only across one of the long sides of the quadrangle. It was in three tiers beginning with the ground floor and ending at the fourth storey of the castle in a stone-paved terrace with a balustrade. There was a door at only one end of the arcade, the door which opened on the gallery in the great tower. At the other end just outside of the colonnade a graceful turret sprang from the wall supported by a wooden corbel shaped and carved like the calyx of a flower. This turret was but one story high with five narrow lance-shaped windows and a peaked extinguisher roof.

Beyond the turret came a row of three Gothic windows in the centre of the building which closed the courtyard at the end opposite the square tower. The entire wall was overgrown with ivy, so thick that it almost shrouded a doorway opening into the garden.



Opposite the arcade in the centre of the other long side of the quadrangle was a structure with a gabled roof, a round rose window and an arched doorway, all built of rough stone. It looked as though it might once have been a chapel, but it had no cross or statue of Virgin or saint, and Reginald could see by the light of the moon that the glass in the rose-window had been shattered and the fragments glinted here and there in the stone tracery. A low building on either side of the chapel with a steep roof and dormer windows finished the enclosure on that side.

Reginald noticed all these details as he lingered in the colonnade before entering his bedroom where he dropped into a chair and tried to get his wits together. Everything that had happened to him since sunset seemed so unreal that his brain was quite bewildered. How could such things occur to a Boston man in the twentieth century? But for the railway-train and the motor, it was much more like stepping back into another age as he had read of people doing in the waking visions reported to the Psychical Research Society. The Count and his servants, the game of piquet and the Mozart music, all might be historic reflections in a brain wave.

A discreet tap at the door of the dressing-room recalled Reginald to reality and Hawkins,—Hawkins was his English valet. He was very loquacious and Reginald had encouraged his volubility when trav-

elling because Hawkins' *impressions de voyage* amused him. To-night Hawkins looked portentous.

"It's the queerest place ever I was in, sir," he remarked as he hovered about, seeming unwilling to go.

"You may come at nine to-morrow," said his master, winding his watch.

"Yes, sir," responded Hawkins and then pursued his desire to give information. "The Count is not retired yet, sir. I had to come through the big room downstairs to get here. It seemed to be the only way up on this side, sir, them stone stairs in the front hall.

"It is one of the biggest houses I ever saw in either England or America, but so inconvenient. There is no hot water running in the bath-tub, sir. The Count's valet speaks a little English and he told me the 'eating is done in a brick stove above, sir, and it takes two hours."

"All right," responded Reginald wearily. Hawkins pulled the bed-curtains for the second time and continued:

"It must take a sight of money, too, to run the place even with such rough servants. When I come by, sir, the Count was sitting at his writing-table, a-talking to that old man with a beard who seems to run the place and to be the father of all of them. 'There,' says the Count in German, 'you take them

and pay all the bills and wages and deposit what's left at Innsbruck to-morrow,' and the Count just 'ands the old man a bunch of bank-notes. I never seen 'ouse-keeping done such a way, sir."

"That is no business of yours, Hawkins. Do go to bed."

"Good night, sir. I'll come about nine; the 'ot water will be ready then, sir."

Reginald bolted the door after the retreating valet who carried a candle in a big brass candlestick in one hand and his master's boots in the other. Reginald, in his dressing-gown and slippers, could not make up his mind to go to bed at once; so after lighting a cigar, he opened the door and stepped out into the soft night air.

Below him stretched the garden, full of quivering lights and shadows cast by the round moon that was perched just above the gable of the ruined chapel. From its stone basin the fountain shot up in a shaft of light and fell back like a shower of stars. The scent of big red roses was wafted from the flower-beds, and crimson ramblers ran at will over the lattice-work of a tiny summer-house. The moonlight glittered on the narrow windows of the little turret at the opposite end, and the ivy-covered wall seemed to shiver in the night-wind.

Reginald Grafton smoked peacefully, leaning against a pillar of the arcade and thought of Leonora Bardi. Half an hour slipped away, his

cigar was finished and his eyelids felt heavy with sleep. He was on the point of retiring when a sharp, dry sound aroused his attention, like the hasp of a casement window grown rusty. It came from the farther end of the garden.

As Reginald gazed in that direction this impression was confirmed; for he saw that one of the narrow windows of the turret was opening slowly inwards, its glittering panes giving place to a dark hole. Inside the turret there was not a ray of light and now as Reginald crouched watching (himself invisible), he beheld an apparition so weird and fantastic that no dream or psychic vision could compare with its impossible unreality.

Forth from the gloomy aperture there slipped something dark, distinct and at first shapeless; but as it slid downward over the window-sill, the creature forked itself, first below and then above, until it had the appearance of an enormous lizard without a tail. It hung suspended for a moment, casting a wavering shadow upon the wooden corbel that supported the turret; and then it began to wriggle slowly sideways, until what seemed to be the fore-legs shot out and grasped a thick branch of ivy that made a loop against the wall.

Reginald held his breath watching: and he saw the thing begin to glide downward, at first slowly and then faster, until it disappeared in a dark shadow thrown across the wall by a thick group

of lilac bushes in front of the stone doorway.

Reginald Grafton was frankly frightened. Nothing human that he had ever seen could have performed such a feat as this; and in the moonlight, along the wall of an old castle, opposite a dismantled chapel, the effect was demoniac.

Reginald, however, was not a person who had ever troubled himself after any fashion about supernatural things. So he pulled himself together and began to consider what he had better do. Should he arouse Goritzki? Was it a thief that he had seen? Apart from the singularity of the exit, even if a thief could have accomplished it, he certainly would not have carried anything of value away with him. And then there came to Reginald an awful suspicion. Might not this weird creature be Goritzki himself? There seemed to be something strange and abnormal about him at times.

But Reginald dismissed this surmise as incredible. More likely the whole thing was a phantom of his own imagination. While these thoughts flashed through his mind, Reginald was walking swiftly to the door at the end of the arcade. Without any noise, he softly opened it, and gazed down from the gallery into a black well of darkness, listening. And then, in a moment, he heard very distinctly, soft and cat-like footsteps upon the floor below; and a smothered laugh, followed by the opening and closing of the front door; then silence.

Reginald drew back, feeling calmer. As he crossed through the arcade to his bedroom door, he heard once more a sharp dry click. This time, when he looked at the turret, he saw that the narrow window was closed, and the moonlight glittered again upon the lozenge panes.

"Whatever it is, it is none of my business," Reginald concluded as he switched off the electric light, after carefully bolting his door.

Soon he was fast asleep. After all, he was young and he had strong nerves.

## CHAPTER V

**W**HEN Reginald Grafton came downstairs the next morning at ten o'clock, he found the door wide open leading into the salon which Goritzki called his "den," and his host already there, seated at the carved writing-desk, looking over some papers. At sight of Reginald, he started up at once and came forward. His pale face looked much younger than the day before, having a faint suggestion of pink over the cheek-bones. His eyes, too, were steadier and seemed farther apart than when he rolled them incessantly from side to side, as he did when playing cards or in the excitement of conversation. Nothing in his appearance indicated weariness or a night's ramble; and Reginald dismissed his fantastic vision as a phantom of moonlight and shadow.

"I am going to show you something more of the ancient pile. We shall breakfast on the bastion of the big round tower at the edge of the cliff, which in old times was a sort of fortified terrace from which the garrison at the castle could observe the movement of any hostile troops in the valley or on the mountain sides." While speaking, Goritzki

led the way through the garden and along a paved path toward the Gothic archway (opposite to the great square tower) where the ivy grew so thick upon the old stone wall.

The whole quadrangle was still in shadow and the sweet breath of early morning hovered over the rose garden. As they approached the open doorway, Reginald could see, through the dark space beyond it, a flash of blue sky and a glimpse of jagged grey mountain ridges on a far horizon, blazing in the sunlight. Goritzki glanced upward before entering and pointed toward the curious little turret on the right above his head.

"That is really the prettiest architectural bit in the castle. It is as graceful as a delicate flower, springing out of the rough grey stone. It opens out of my dressing-room." Goritzki's mouth twisted up at one corner and the look in his black eyes was not pleasant as he added: "A lady's apartment used to be in this wing of the castle, and that small round room was once a boudoir."

Reginald shivered slightly; for as his eyes wandered down from the turret, he became aware of a hanging branch of ivy torn loose from the wall to the right of the doorway which they were just entering.

They passed through a panelled hall with a narrow stairway on the right leading upward, and from thence to the bastion terrace beyond, where the



breakfast-table was laid and a servant waiting. Grass grew in the cracks of the stone pavement, and big tubs of flowering oleander were ranged along the parapet, from which the cliff went down in a sheer, smooth wall of rock to the valley four hundred feet below, where a deep cleft (or gorge) hid the torrent from sight, but the stream emerged farther away, bounding over the rocks and boulders on its way to the River Inn.

"By Jove!" said Reginald, looking over the edge, and then gazing out over the valley to the Martinswand on the horizon, "this is a wonderfully picturesque site for a castle."

"The people of old always liked to be high up for other reasons than a love of nature. My worthy ancestors were like the rest of the world at that epoch, of predatory habits. Greifenstein, however, is really beautiful and so accessible on one side that, as you saw, a motor comes easily up the zigzag '*Fahrweg*.' I did not have to change the grade, I only widened the road twelve years ago, at a time when I was still very prosperous."

"This place has been a long time in your family, I suppose," half questioned Reginald.

"Long from an American point of view, but short for us ancient people," smiled Goritzki. "My family belongs to Galicia as the name indicates. It is of very old Polish origin and our estates in Poland have been for centuries in the

possession of the Goritzkis. This Schloss Greifenstein, however, came into the family with my great-grandmother in 1790 along with a large estate in Bohemia. She was a Princess Greifenstein (Bohemian) and a rich heiress in her own right. She and my great-grandfather gathered the whole of her estate into a *Fideicommiss*, which, as I told you last night, is strictly entailed, and it has passed directly from father to son for four generations. Failing direct issue, the entire estate reverts to the Greifensteins. The present representative of that family, young 'Erni' Greifenstein, who is twenty-four years old and in the navy, is the next heir (presumptive) since I have no son." Goritzki paused and gave Reginald a cigarette, and lighting one for himself leant back in his chair, saying:

"That is my family history, dear Mr. Grafton. I am the first member of it who has, alas, made ducks and drakes of the family fortunes. But who knows? The prodigal Goritzki may yet come back to *himself* (having no father to return to) and even though neither penitent nor regenerate, he may kill his own fatted calves in honor of a return to riches: that is, if Fate shall smile upon me."

Goritzki was again in an expansive and communicative humour.

"I am 'giving myself away' again, as a charming American friend of mine puts it," he laughed airily: "but I want you to feel that you are no

stranger here and that you will surely come again."

Reginald promised readily but with a mental reservation. He did not feel quite at ease with Goritzki; although almost ashamed of himself he had to acknowledge a slightly creepy feeling in the presence of his host, as people felt about Peter Schlemihl after he had sold his shadow to the devil.

Evidently Goritzki had made no such bargain, for at this moment he cast a very purple shadow upon the stone pavement. The sun, having risen above the roof on the eastern side of the terrace, was sending a stream of gold across the spot where the breakfast-table stood. A canvas awning had once been stretched along the castle wall as some heavy iron bars testified but it must have been gone a long time, for only a frayed and knotted rope hung from one corner of the framework. Goritzki, pushing back his chair, sprang to his feet and proposed an adjournment to the library.

"You have not yet seen that part of the castle," he said, and leading the way to a door on the western side of the terrace, he threw it open and motioned Reginald Grafton to enter.

"What an amazing room!" cried the latter, pausing in wonder just beyond the threshold. He stood in a hall which, like the entrance-hall in the great square tower, took up the entire space inside of the building, and was all white and gold. An enormous crystal chandelier hung from the ceiling, fit

for the ballroom of a palace and filled with electric candles. The floor was of polished oak. At the farther end and along each side ran a wide gallery, fenced in by a delicately carved balustrade, with a Louis XVI design of festoons of roses, tied with bows of ribbon; all painted white and gold.

Along the gallery on the right where was the outer wall of the castle, were three wide bay-windows, cut in the thickness of the masonry, which measured nearly three metres. Between the bay-windows, the entire space was filled with rows of shallow book-shelves from floor to ceiling.

The gallery on the opposite side was lighted by the five dormer windows of the perpendicular roof looking upon the garden, beneath each of which were ranged against the wall five sofas covered with red damask. The wall space between was filled as on the other side, by book-shelves from floor to ceiling; and all of them were empty. Small armchairs and light *chaises volantes*, white and gold with red damask cushions, were scattered along the galleries near the balcony. Below on the polished oak floor of the hall there was no furniture whatever.

"Ballroom and library," announced Goritzki with a wave of his hand, "untenanted as the skull of Yorick. No more jibes nor jests, neither sense nor nonsense. We used to dance here all night after our big hunts. The ballroom survived the library. The books I took away years ago to my palazetto in

Venice — what were left of them. *They* were not entailed and I was free to dispose of them. In fact, if it had not been for books and forest trees, I really do not know how the prodigal could have survived."

Reginald began to grow restive under the Count's reiterated impenitent confessions of sin; and Goritzki, observing it, tactfully changed the subject.

"You must come to me in Venice some time," he said. "I am usually there in the spring and early autumn. Monte Carlo claims me during the winter months since I abandoned Vienna and Budapest. Do come to Venice! We'll drift about in my gondola by day and by night, and we'll sit and dream in my rose garden overlooking the grand Canal.

"Venice is the ideal spot for a '*dolce far niente*' life. It is like living within a great opal as high as the sky and as wide as the sea, more splendid than the mystic egg of Brahma. Every sense is enchanted in Venice. For the eye, there are pictures and palaces; for the ear, every sound is music; the lap of the waves, the booming of distant bells, the soft breeze from the sea lazily flapping the red and orange sails. And for the nose (when one can ignore the aroma of small canals stirred by the sirocco)," Goritzki grimaced, "there is a profusion of exquisite odours — honey-suckle, white jasmine, heliotrope, and the sweetest red roses that ever bloomed. If always I were living in Venice, I really believe I should be the most harmless creature alive:

incapable of any vice or any excess, only existing beautifully, in a moderation poetic and classic, far from the distortions and monstrosities of the strenuous modern world."

Here was a new Goritzki: soft and suave like the golden voice that had sung "*Il mio tesoro*" the night before. His glittering eyes were half veiled by white eyelids, as he murmured softly:

"Yes, dear Mr. Grafton, come to Venice, and I will sing for you; and friends of mine shall sing to you also, beautiful ladies with angelic voices. How I hated to tear myself away yesterday morning, especially so early! But affairs of importance have called me to Greifenstein. And now, for every reason, I am thankful to have caught that train at Trent in which you were seated. Really Fate was kind to me!"

All this talk has been set down as a monologue, because what Reginald had to say was of no moment: an occasional remark, assent or interjection, was all his part of the conversation. Goritzki was evidently used to having the floor and was no good listener. Besides, his curiosity was amply satisfied by Reginald Grafton's assertion that he was "shamefully rich" and by the corroborative testimony of the roll of bank-notes carried about so casually; which was the only fact connected with the young American that interested Goritzki in any way whatever: while, on the other hand, Reginald

Grafton was very curious indeed, for many reasons, with regard to this new acquaintance; and the oftener he looked at him or heard him speak the more he was baffled: alternately fascinated and repelled.

The hours from eleven to one passed swiftly. At twelve o'clock a *déjeuner à la fourchette*, light and artistic, was served in the dining-hall.

"I must speed the parting guest," Goritzki announced, "it will take about forty minutes to run over to Innsbruck and to get yourself installed comfortably in the Munich express before the train from Verona arrives. You will excuse me for taking leave of you here?"

Reginald protested that he would on no account allow his host to go to the station at Innsbruck.

"I am treating you *sans façon* — like an old friend," Goritzki assured him when he squeezed Reginald's hand at parting.

"You are to bring your father back in the motor," he said to the chauffeur as the car started.

Goritzki gazed after the car until it swung round the first bend of the road; then he smiled an amused smile (combined with his cynical sneer): "This time," he said to himself, "my sensitive conscience has no cause whatever for reproach. I won that money by skill and intelligence, nothing more. He played like a child of twelve a game which (in good old times in France — and even now in London) is

a coiner of gold to him who knows how to work it."

Goritzki rubbed his white hands as he turned to go in.

"I wish that I may meet that young Bostonian again — and more like him. Such as he would make life easier for me: '*sans peur*' and entirely '*sans reproche*!'"



## CHAPTER VI

**W**HEN Reginald Grafton drove up to the railway station at Innsbruck half an hour later, he beheld the Head Forester waiting upon the steps. The old man raised his hat to the young American stranger, gazing intently at him from shrewd blue eyes under shaggy eyebrows.

Hawkins (having arranged the smaller baggage in the net of a "*Rauch coupé*"), had just departed to his place in the second class, and Reginald, after lighting a cigar, had crossed his legs and opened a Baedeker to see if any mention was made of Greifenstein, when he became conscious of a presence in the doorway and looking up beheld, to his surprise, the Head Forester standing on the threshold, cap in hand.

"Does the gnädiger Herr speak German?" asked the old man in that language.

Reginald assured him that, at least, he could understand it, if spoken distinctly and not too fast; and then he wondered what was coming. The old forester, leaning forward, began to speak slowly and without hesitation as though his mind was quite made up with regard to what he was going to say:

"My name is Johann Swoboda. We are Bohemians and from father to son we have lived at Greifenstein for four generations as Head Foresters. My great-grandfather came here with the Princess Wanda in 1790, after her marriage with Count Goritzki, great-grandfather to the present Erlaucht. We have all of us been faithful servants to our masters; but from the very beginning our fealty has been sworn personally and in our own hearts to the high-born ladies, their wives. The first of us came here, as I said, with the Princess Wanda Greifenstein, and this same fidelity has run through the three succeeding generations, happy and unhappy."

"*Ja wohl*," responded Reginald, vaguely wondering why the old man was talking to him at all and whether it were possible that he had been drinking. His light blue eyes were clear and steady, however, and there was about him an air of stolid dignity which precluded that suspicion. The train over the Brenner came thundering in at this moment and the Munich express would be off in fifteen minutes. Reginald's coupé might be invaded. The old forester seemed to realise these facts for he came in past the doorway and, bending low, spoke rapidly in an undertone:

"You know the great actress, La Bardi?"

"Yes. What makes you think I do?"

"Your servant said that you are going to Munich to see her."

"What the devil does Hawkins mean?" interjected Reginald.

"He knew that she is called the Countess Goritzka, but never mind that now," the old man responded almost sternly. "What I want to say to you is this: I have always been true to her and the gracious lady knows it. I would have died for her willingly during the six years she lived at the Schloss. I am only telling you this; she knows it well. I want you to say to the Signora from me," the old man stooped lower and spoke almost in a whisper: "say to her that some danger threatens her. I don't know exactly what it is but tell her that something happened last night which has aroused my suspicions. She must be watchful. I gather that she is going to be robbed, I don't know of what. It cannot be jewels—but it is something which she prizes. That is all I can say. When I know more I shall try to warn her farther. I may even go to Munich if possible while she is there. God knows how I long to see her again and the little girl (now big). Tell the Signora I do not forget. I would die for her now as then." His voice faltered and tears were in his eyes, but straightening himself, he resumed in quite another tone of voice: "I am very sorry, gnädiger Herr, for what happened last night."

"What do you mean?" asked the surprised American.

"All that money —"

Reginald stiffened. "That is all right," said he curtly.

"Gambling is a curse," responded the Head Forester. "*Auf Wiedersehen, gnädiger Herr. Ich empfehle mich.*"

These words were spoken hastily as the old man, still cap in hand, backed out of the coupé into the corridor to give place to a gay young gentleman with a small moustache and rather Oriental eyes, who entered the coupé, swinging a black valise and stopped short in surprise at sight of Reginald:

"*Mais comment!*" exclaimed this newcomer in French. "Monsieur Reginald Grafton, how do you do? I am charmed to find you again."

"Delighted to see you, Remenyi," answered Reginald, whose French was excellent. "Are you just up from Rome?"

"*Dieu merci!* Two months holiday and then promotion to Petersburg: second Secretary."

"My felicitations!" Reginald said, offering a cigar which the other took and lighted.

"You may well say that!" he commented.

Remenyi was a rather harum-scarum young Hungarian of twenty-two, in the Austrian diplomatic service, who had found Rome *ennuyeux* and the diplomatic dinners there quite *infectes*. He had once even hinted with dashing exaggeration as to

the good cheer at one Legation: "*On y mange du rat mort.*"

"In Petersburg," announced Remenyi, waving his cigar, "one can eat, drink and be merry."

The young Count Remenyi was not at all Reginald's sort, but he had met him at the Palazzo Saltieri in Rome, the only place where Leonora Bardi appeared in society, and even there meeting only a small circle of intimate friends and occasionally a few privileged strangers. Reginald Grafton was one of the latter, his aunt having married a cousin of the Princess Saltieri. Remenyi had also been admitted during the previous winter (in spite of the fact that he belonged to the Austrian Embassy at the Quirinal) because his father, a distinguished Hungarian statesman, had once been ambassador to the Vatican, and was an intimate friend of the Saltieris. Remenyi had immediately fallen upon his knees to adore "*La Bardi*" (whom he called "*la femme la plus adorable du monde*") and this was a bond of sympathy in hopelessness between him and Reginald Grafton. They were both worshippers of the same idol, who did not care.

The train started and a moment later Remenyi, who was looking out of the window, suddenly stopped talking and uttered a growl which was a half-articulated oath.

"What is the matter?" asked Reginald, staring at him.

"*Voilà Greifenstein!*" snapped Remenyi, pointing a quivering gray-gloved finger like a spectral accusation at a distant sunlit tower on a cliff up the valley to the right.

"Ah," was all that the diplomatic Reginald responded, looking vaguely at the spot where he had spent the previous night.

"Why, that is Goritzki's château — *her* husband's."

"What sort of a man is Goritzki?" asked Reginald, rather languidly.

Remenyi stared at him. "Don't you know?" he asked. "Goritzki — he is the devil."

Reginald at once set about gaining enlightenment by the proverbial New England method.

"Do you know him?" was his first question.

"Know him? Of course, I would not know him *now!*" was the prompt answer.

"Have you ever seen him?"

"Often. He used to come to my father's hunting parties in Hungary every year, but that was years ago when I was a little boy."

"What was he like?"

"Extraordinarily handsome then, with black eyes that glittered like a snake's and a small black moustache. *She* was with him the first time he came, when I was a child of seven. She looked very frail and young, almost like a child herself, I remember, and she was only nineteen. I sat on her

knee," added Remenyi, laughing, "but I did not recall this fact to 'La Bardi' when we met again in Rome last winter."

"A good deal older than you are," commented the jealous rival, himself a year older than Leonora: quite a suitable age.

"*Ces femmes-là n'ont pas d'âge*," responded the Hungarian youth with a far-away rapturous look in his Oriental eyes, and then he pursued in a more matter of fact tone:

"She was very unhappy, *la pauvre Léonore*, already at that time. Goritzki can always behave well enough when he is sober but when he is drunk, *mon Dieu*, he is a fiend incarnate. He used to beat her!"

"Great Heavens! How do you know that?" asked Reginald, horrified, hating to hear, yet anxious to know.

"The servants said so. Sometimes, too, even the guests would be aroused by noises at night, as of smashed glass or furniture, followed by sounds of weeping. One cynic, a friend of mine, has told me about it since and refreshed my memory. 'When we heard sounds of riot and of the smashing of breakable objects in the small hours,' he said, 'we used only to murmur to ourselves, "There goes Goritzki!" and then we turned over and went to sleep again.' Of course things had grown much worse, one summer five years later, when Leonora

was living at Greifenstein with her child." Remenyi pointed back toward the castle which was melting away in the distance.

"How could things be worse?"

"Well, he brought queer people of all kinds into the house not fit company for a woman like Leonora. And then came the final *bouleversement*. At this time the Countess was twenty-two, and her little girl, Bianca, three years old. There had been a roistering crew at the castle for over a week; men and women of the most reckless 'smart-set,' given over to racing and gambling, and with no other aim or object in life. There had been high playing and deep drinking. One night, long after midnight, the orgie was so fast and furious in the ball-room, that the old priest, who was chaplain in the Castle, with the Countess and the Head Forester, had taken refuge in Leonora's boudoir, next to the room where her child was sleeping. This boudoir opens into a small round turret-room, with a row of windows looking upon the garden, at one of which the Head Forester stationed himself, with a gun, in order to protect the mother and child, if necessary, from the blind fury of Goritzki, who had been crazed by drink, and was raging down below like a madman. They say that he had lost heavily at cards, and the evil luck had preyed upon his mind. He kept repeating in an awful voice, with a fixed stare in his devilish eyes: 'My wife is rich:



my wife is rich: all she has ought to be mine *now*, as it must be mine *some day*!’

“His companions, male and female, could do nothing with him. One of them (who had arrived only that night at the castle) told me the whole story three years ago. The clock in the chapel tower had just struck four. Somebody said: ‘If you don’t go to bed pretty soon, Goritzki, the Countess will be having her early Mass in the chapel. It is already daylight.’ (It was late in the month of June, about this time of the year.)

“Now you must know that Goritzki, even as a boy, was a bitter scoffer, an aggressive hater of religion; but he knew also how to be a hypocrite when there was anything to gain by it. He made people believe that he was quite reconciled to the Church when he found that on that condition only could he marry the beautiful Leonora Bardi, Princess Olga Leuchtenberg’s niece and ward.

“Her mother and her guardian (the only brother of her father), then Archbishop of Milan, did their utmost to prevent the marriage, having a deep distrust of Goritzki. But the young girl was determined and infatuated and no wonder. I am told that Goritzki eighteen years ago was the most brilliant and fascinating creature imaginable and moreover he had a tenor voice which as one admirer said: ‘could lure the birds from the trees and draw the heart out of a woman.’ Of course, too, Gor-

itzki was madly in love with Leonora. You know what she is to-day at thirty-four, you can imagine what she must have been at seventeen.

“Well, the marriage took place. All the guardians could accomplish was ‘*séparation de biens*,’ for Leonora Bardi inherited from her mother what twenty years ago was considered to be a large fortune, something like two million crowns.”

Reginald Grafton had been listening with a set face and clenched teeth to the horrors so glibly unfolded by the young Hungarian. His half-smoked cigar had gone out and he tossed it through the open window.

“Go on, please. What happened that night?”

“Ah, yes, I must finish that awful story,” said Remenyi and continued his narrative.

“To go back, then. Somebody spoke of the chapel and of an early Mass. This brought Goritzki suddenly to his feet. He had been seated in a *fauteuil* in the dining-hall apparently too drunk to stand up but now his frenzy gave him legs. ‘Never again!’ he cried, ‘never while I live shall that damned clock strike again and never shall there be another Mass in that infernal chapel!’

“He staggered into the great hall and seizing a battle-axe with one hand from a sheaf of weapons on the wall and with the other snatching a burning candle from a sconce beside it, he rushed through the doorway leading into the courtyard and dashed

madly into the chapel. A few of the guests tried to follow him but he had already bolted the door on the inside. In another minute the mad Goritzki had climbed up within the chapel, smashed the works of the clock and shattered the glass in the rose-window just below it.

"Five minutes later he came out and a cloud of smoke surged after him, for he had flung the burning candle on the altar, setting fire to the covering and screen. The fire burnt itself out, destroying everything inflammable. Meanwhile Goritzki had climbed like a cat up the carved archway outside, still grasping in one hand the battle-axe. First he sprang to the mullions of the shattered rose-window and reaching upward smashed the face of the clock.

"No one could do anything but watch him. The Head Forester stood below with the crowd of visitors. He held his gun but of course he would not shoot. Goritzki next climbed the gable and with a blow of the axe tore away the iron cross at the peak. He then dropped his axe to the ground below and with an impish grin, he threw himself astride of the ridge of the roof, and dragging the cross with him, he slid along toward the outer wall where the precipice runs sheer down more than four hundred feet. When he had reached the farther end, Goritzki, swinging the cross aloft with both hands, flung it over the cliff into the gorge below.

"I am telling you the story as it was told by my

friend who was an eye-witness. Goritzki then crawled swiftly back along the ridge; climbed nimbly down and re-entered the great hall, followed by all the company. All his fiery rage seemed completely quenched and he announced quietly to the sobered and bewildered assembly, 'It is finished!' Then he went off to bed.

"At sunrise that same morning his wife and his child with the poor old priest, carrying from the sacristy the sacred vessels and vestments and altar-breads, departed all three from the castle, escorted by the Head Forester and accompanied by Bianca's nurse and the countess's maid. And never since that day has Leonora set foot in Greifenstein: nor ever will.

"There is the whole story. I thought you might have heard it before or some part of it. That is why I said, 'Goritzki is the devil.'"

Reginald Grafton looked out of the window for some time in perturbed silence, while young Remenyi smoked complacently, puffing slow rings of hazy blue smoke and watching them rise and melt away. At last Remenyi said:

"Before we leave this unpleasant subject, which I see affects you disagreeably, let me give you a word of warning, in case you should ever happen to meet Goritzki, which is quite possible, if you stay any time in Venice; for there he is a social animal in smart circles, and most attentive and affable to

wealthy strangers, British or American. Don't play cards with him!"

Reginald Grafton turned about and stared hard at Remenyi, while the latter pursued: "Nobody knows the details as to what happened in Budapest at the Country Club about two years ago, with the exception of three men who have kept the matter a profound secret. But what is known to everybody connected with the Country Club or with the Jockey Club in Vienna is that Goritzki lost a fortune in Budapest one night at play with these three men; that he asked them to give him his '*revanche*' the next night; and that since that memorable evening he has not darkened the doors of either the Country Club in Budapest or the Jockey Club in Vienna, but he is still a member of both. Goritzki has been hard up since, although his luck at Monte Carlo is phenomenal. He leads an extravagant life in Venice, however, and makes his only economies during a part of the year, I am told, at Schloss Greifenstein, where nobody goes any more. Now I have uttered my word of warning and we have wasted a golden hour on a most disagreeable subject.

"Let us *dédommager* ourselves by discussing the beautiful ladies of Rome, who, some of them almost made up for the dreary *ennui* of Roman diplomatic life and the '*cuisine infecte*' of most of

the official dinners. *La plus belle des belles* was, of course, the incomparable Leonora Bardi."

Reginald Grafton looked up quickly (his mind had been wandering) at the mention of this name.

"Remenyi," he said in a tone of rebuke, "the Signora is as good as she is beautiful and should not be named in the same breath with some of your gay Quirinal court ladies."

"Good! Of course she is, most discouragingly good," responded Remenyi, "but then her mother was a Leuchtenberg and the women of that family are very *dévôte*. Oh, the Signora was brought up most strictly and her aunt, the Princess Olga, watches her like a hawk."

"She does not need watching," declared Reginald sententiously. Remenyi's dark eyes twinkled.

"I did not say she *needs* it, I only said she *gets* it; not only from her aunt but from her deceased father's brother, the eloquent Archbishop of Milan. By the way, I never heard him preach but I am told that he equals La Bardi in fervour and reminds one of her, although she has the hazel eyes and light hair of the Leuchtenbergs to mask her Italian heart. Perhaps that is what keeps her so straight, in spite of the fact that she looks so like the accepted portrait of that very frisky queen that the audience goes wild everywhere over her 'Maria Stuarda.'"

Reginald Grafton interfered. "Look here, Re-

menyi," he said, "if you really care about history you will find that the Queen of Scots was much calumniated. Ever since I was a boy and read the Waverley novels with romantic enthusiasm, she has been to me a star, and I have taken pains to read and study all that can be found about her, especially since I have known the Signora," Reginald added, looking rather sheepish.

Remenyi tossed his head and laughed.

"Leonora is a charming re-incarnation; even the original Queen Mary might admit that. You know her aunt also sometimes calls her 'Little Mary Stuart.' It appears they once saw in the Duc d'Alençon's collection of pictures at Belmont Park a lovely head of Mary Stuart at fifteen which they considered even more like Leonora than the somewhat doubtful 'Douglas' portrait. However, she certainly plays the queen to the life; as to that there can be no dispute. Also there is no doubt that La Bardi is above suspicion. However, this may be a question of time. She has many adorers. She is thirty-four — a critical age. *C'est l'adieu à la jeunesse!*"

Reginald Grafton frowned and again looked out of the window. He disliked Remenyi's prattle and yet he could not help listening to this half-fledged worldling's comments on persons and things with some curiosity. Remenyi cast a mischievous glance at Reginald Grafton's classic and serious profile.

He, too, had suffered and he had no desire to spare his rival the qualms of jealousy.

"There was more or less gossip, you know, about the adoration of that young lord, second secretary of the British Embassy. (Perhaps you did not know him — Lord Arthur St. John, second son of the Duke of Windermere.) He worshipped the ground La Bardi trod upon and altogether made such a fool of himself, going every night when she played in December and sitting in the same front-row place, gaping open-mouthed (and never stirring even during the *entre-actes*) that *his* behaviour set people talking; not anything La Bardi did."

The colour had slowly crept into Reginald Grafton's face during this speech.

"I did not come to Rome until nearly the end of January," he said in a voice which he strove to suppress to a level of indifference, "and I certainly never saw the man you speak of, nor heard of him."

"Ah," cried Remenyi, "*cela s'explique*. I dare say the ladies and their friends found his assiduity annoying and have been trying to forget him. Be that as it may, Lord Arthur vanished from Rome early in January, taking leave of nobody; and I have heard vaguely since that he is in India or Africa hunting big game. The Embassy offered no explanation as to his sudden departure. They only said he had got a year's '*congé*.' This all happened, of course, before you came to Rome."



## CHAPTER VII

### I

**M**ORE than fifty years before the beginning of this story, in or near the year 1860, Prince Ferdinand Leuchtenberg, then a young and not inconsolable widower, had taken to himself a second wife, who was not generally approved of, except by his little girl, the Princess Olga, who was ten years old at the time and who passionately loved her beautiful young stepmother. This lady was of a noble Polish family, but impoverished, and she was singing at the Opera in Vienna when the Prince first saw her. In fact, that was the reason that his own family considered this second marriage decidedly a *mésalliance*. The beautiful young wife died a year after the wedding and the little Princess Olga transferred her adoration to the baby, a little girl named Marie.

Five years later Prince Leuchtenberg was thrown from his horse and killed. At this time the Princess Olga had grown to be a tall girl of sixteen and already was like a second mother to the little Princess Marie. After their father's death the two sisters lived with a widowed aunt in Vienna during the

winter, and in the summer with their brother, Prince Ernest Leuchtenberg, at the ancestral Schloss in Styria, which was their birthplace. When they should come of age, they were each to have two million crowns, a very large fortune for an heiress before the invasion of American millions.

The widowed aunt, Princess Griefenstein, was a born match-maker and greatly interested in finding desirable *partis* for her two desirable nieces. The Princess Marie was superior in beauty but the Princess Olga was of far higher rank than her half-sister, her mother having belonged to a reigning principality which took precedence even of the Leuchtenbergs, while Princess Marie's operatic mother had not even been "*Hoffähig*" in Vienna, a privilege which was accorded, however, to her child as the daughter of Prince Leuchtenberg.

To the match-making aunt's grievous disappointment, Olga flatly refused to marry two or three almost royal personages on the ground that she did not like them, which she considered quite a sufficient reason; and at thirty she announced a fixed intention never to marry at all.

The baffled old Princess Greifenstein then set about finding a susceptible lover of high rank to become the husband of the beautiful Marie, then twenty years old. But in this too she was doomed to fail; for during a winter spent in Florence, the young and romantic Marie fell in love with a fragile

Italian youth, the Marchese Angelo Bardi, who wrote musical lyrics and dreamed his life away. This latter occupation was really not his fault for even if he had been vigorous his "*intransigente*" mother would have forbidden him to serve under the "*Italia liberata*"; so that the navy, the army and even the diplomatic service of his country were closed careers for him.

His only brother had become a priest, already famous for his ardour and eloquence and Angelo had no vocation for the priesthood. In the spring of that same year, Princess Marie Leuchtenberg married Angelo Bardi, encouraged thereto by her sister, Olga, who thought the romance of it very beautiful. Unfortunately the idyl did not last long. Angelo died two years later, leaving his wife and a little girl, Leonora, just six months old.

Princess Olga went at once to Florence, where the two sisters lived together in an old house with a garden, their lives bound up in the life of the child. Olga Leuchtenberg, at the age of thirty-two, had already become one of the typical spinsters who seem to have been predestined to a settled maidenhood, not of the kind secluded from the world, but dominating both society and all social movements. She was a devout Catholic and everything human was for her dependent (whether consciously and willingly or no) upon this great centre of Christendom.

Modern profanation of art and the modern laxity of morals which appears even in female costume and society dances (in fact the whole evolution of a self-glorifying heathenism) the Princess considered to be graver offences than mere blunders against beauty and moderation. They were sins against God and His commandments. All her time and much of her money she spent in combating the degeneracy of modern times. In Princess Olga's youth, Italian poetic art had not let go of the high ideals of a Christian past. It had not yet flung itself headlong from sky to gutter to wallow there shrieking profane horrors with the golden tongue of Gabriele d'Annunzio. All modern literature of this degenerate type; plays, novels or poetry, in every tongue, the Princess characterised by one favorite French word: "Cochonneries," and being proud also of her expressive English she used to say, in speaking of the author of any of these decadent indecencies:

"He is a filthy fellow!"

She liked to repeat, *à propos* of Bernard Shaw's creations, the words of Voltaire to Rousseau: "*Il prend envie de marcher à quatre pattes quand on lit vos romans.*"

## II

And now I must try to convey some idea of that extraordinary creature and wonderful actress, Leonora Bardi, who made the whole world quiver

with emotion by a look or a word or, more potent still, by flashes of superhuman silence, as brilliant and expressive as the luminous darkness of mysticism. When Leonora was a little child her love for every created lower animal amounted to what her French governess called a "*folie*." She wanted the cat to sleep with her, and when promptly refused by Mademoiselle who said: "It will suck your blood," she demanded and obtained the gift of a little white Lupetto dog, which slept at the foot of her bed. When she was ten years old, Leonora was given a pony and also an English governess whom she much preferred to Mademoiselle because "Miss" liked to take long tramps out of doors and kept the windows open at night.

Leonora then demanded to sleep in the stable with her pony and when she was laughed to scorn, she indignantly protested:

"I'll sleep with anything that won't hurt me!"

The child's peculiar genius began at this time to assert itself. She said one day to her mother and her aunt:

"I should like to *be* everything alive!" And then began for the lonely little girl (whose anxious guardians had kept her away from other children through a dread of measles and other contagions) a series interminable of what she called the "animal game." In it she played every rôle in the drama of Creation and made up stories of her experiences dur-

ing these different incarnations. When she outgrew this entertainment and had begun to learn verses by heart and read "grown-up" poems and plays both Italian and English (under supervision) she declaimed them with such fire of expression and beauty of tone as to amaze everybody that heard her.

Three years later at thirteen, when she went to a convent school in England, Leonora played the leading parts in a miracle play at Christmas time and in a historic drama in the spring, and as Our Lady and Joan of Arc she was so simple and so beautiful that no one else was allowed or was willing to take those parts during the next three years whenever the plays were repeated. The young girl's nerves began to suffer during her third year at the convent, from giving free rein to her extraordinary imagination. So she sometimes fell into a kind of trance which seemed like ecstatic vision, following the reading of Divine revelations. It seemed to Leonora that she was *living* what she read about. "My soul goes to the outer edge of myself," was her own explanation, "and I feel like St. Paul 'whether in the body or out of the body I know not'; but I *see* things."

Leonora's mother and aunt were summoned to England and a distinguished nerve specialist was called in who declared that the young girl was suffering from over-excitement of the imagination and

a kind of auto-hypnotism. The doctor insisted that she must be drawn away from the mystic side of religion and encouraged to adopt a more simple and everyday piety; to live in the open air and to visit the poor.

The practical Englishman emphasised the necessity of keeping Leonora down to the realities of life.

"You must tie Pegasus to the plough," the old gentleman said, patting the child upon the shoulder. He reassured the anxious women by telling them that Leonora was physically as strong as a zebra. "But watch her nerves," he warned them. "Have you ever noticed that the pupils of her eyes dilate when she is excited like a cat's in a dark room? She comes to the verge of hysteria when she is wrought up by her own mesmeric power. Keep the child well fed and out of doors. You Roman Catholics," he added, "must always be warned by us doctors against too much zeal."

So the two doting women took Leonora away, for rest and recreation to the old castle in Styria, where she lived out of doors. She learned to know every peasant far and near, sewed and played with the children, helped the old priest to teach them their catechism, nursed the sick and loved them all.

The following winter she was taken to Vienna, a marvel of health and beauty, to be presented at a Court ball by the Italian Ambassadors, and, all unknowingly, her devoted slaves were conducting her

to the disaster of her life. For in Vienna Leonora met Goritzki, young, handsome and wonderfully gifted. He painted and he sang and he wrote sonnets. He lifted the romantic Italian girl off her feet and bewitched her. She thought him a vision of beauty from a higher sphere, on another plane than this common earth. Three months later, Leonora, taking the bit in her teeth, making light of all opposition and remonstrance, insisted upon marrying Goritzki. Early in May the marriage took place in the cathedral at Milan, the nuptial Mass being celebrated by her uncle the archbishop, who looked afterward, poor man, as if the wedding had been a funeral. Soon after Leonora's marriage her mother, the Countess Bardi, died, and the Princess Olga was left alone to watch over the niece whom she loved with a mother's love.

## III

It suddenly occurred to Reginald Grafton while he was dressing for dinner at the Russischer Hof, that, since he had decided not to mention his meeting with Goritzki, it became very difficult for him to deliver the message sent to Leonora Bardi by the Head Forester at Greifenstein. He dallied at first with a vague idea of writing an anonymous line of warning to be dropped in some conspicuous place in the Signora's apartment, but dismissed it as a proceeding really beneath his dignity; and more-



over, he had a personal message beside the warning which he had promised the old man to convey to his "gracious lady."

Since Remenyi's extraordinary revelations concerning Goritzki's past and present life, all of which were probably veracious enough in spite of the young Hungarian's tendency toward flighty inaccuracy and exaggeration, Reginald Grafton felt more determined than ever with regard to his own silence.

How could he tell La Bardi that he had been lured to Greifenstein and relieved of two hundred pounds by her former husband, Count Goritzki? Told baldly, the tale of last night's experiences placed Reginald himself in the rather ridiculous position of an innocent stranger duped by a clever villain. He remembered old American anecdotes of "Hayseeds" straying into New York fresh from the country, an easy prey to the flattering advances of adroit "confidence men"; and his thin skin blushed crimson as he finished the bow-knot of a faultless white tie and took a parting glance in the mirror before leaving the room.

Then it suddenly flashed across Reginald that he must also muzzle Hawkins who had undoubtedly picked up more information than he had divulged as to the previous night's entertainment. Reginald was contemplating the necessity of a trip to America, and nothing more deadly could he imagine, for his

own sense of dignity and the influence of his opinions as a travelled man of the world, than that this experience, embroidered by the skilful imagination of Hawkins, should even indirectly reach the Somerset Club of Boston, a society bound together by intimate friendships and eager for material for a time-honored raillery, where personal jokes are sacred traditions repeated and handed down to successive generations. Such a joke as this one at the expense of Reginald Grafton (hailed always as the almost complete cosmopolite — “at home in every land except his own”) would certainly become immortal.

“Hawkins,” said his master quite sternly to that devoted servitor who stood ready to open the door, “I wish to impress something upon your mind.”

“Yes, sir,” answered Hawkins, looking politely receptive.

“You are not to speak of our visit to Greifenstein to any one, mind you, at any time. Er — there are reasons. Of course, I know you would not speak of it here in Munich to any of the Countess’s servants, because you know the Count was formerly the husband of the Signora Bardi, and it would be in very bad taste. But if we should happen to go to America this summer, you are not to breathe a word of it there either, do you understand?”

Hawkins, who was a faithful slave although loose-tongued, promised. There was a slight twinkle

in his eye, for Hawkins did know more than he had divulged. He had overheard Goritzki say to the old Head Forester: "Behold my honest winnings!" a remark which he had not repeated to his master.

When he had closed the door upon the latter, Hawkins executed a few steps of an improvised dance as he straightened things upon the toilet table; and he sang to his own reflection: "'E'll be more on his guard in the future," to the tune of "We won't go home till morning," ending with a refrain, "You bet! you bet! you bet!"

For Hawkins considered Reginald to be very young for his years, as well as "the best be'aved gentleman" he had ever served. Hawkins, in the States, had gone through a lurid experience while valeting a young gentleman named Frost, son of a multi-millionaire, from which trying situation Reginald Grafton had rescued him, thereby earning the eternal gratitude of Hawkins.

## CHAPTER VIII

**I**N the corridor, before the door of the Signora Bardi's apartment, trim and erect, like a sentinel on duty, stood a young and fresh-faced waiter. The most conspicuous features in his smooth pink countenance were two round blue eyes as innocent as a boy's. He had an insignificant nose and a tightly closed mouth with up-turned corners which gave him the cheerful expression of a perpetual smile. His reddish-brown hair, standing stiffly on end, was trimmed perfectly square across the top of his head, above a smooth and unusually high forehead. His personality made one think of a happy cherub, absolutely without guile, who had assumed human shape. His youthful aspect suggested that he was wearing his first tail-coat, but his manners and air were those of an experienced *maitre d'hôtel* in all the pride of office. His face beamed, and he blushed with pleasure when Reginald Grafton paused to shake hands with him, saying:

"Why, Fritz, can it be you yourself? I did not expect to see you here. Have you abandoned Rome and the Hôtel Beau-Site, where you were so long my ministering angel?"

Fritz explained in quite fluent, broken English

that Rome claimed him only in the winter and spring, and that Munich possessed him during the summer and autumn.

"Here lives my old mother: here is my home," he concluded in German.

Noiselessly throwing open the door of the sitting-room, Fritz proceeded to announce the guest as "Excellenz, Herr Reginald Grafton," to two ladies seated on a sofa in an alcove at the farther end of the room. Beyond them two glass doors were thrown wide open, leading on to a long and broad balcony, where nasturtiums, verbenas and petunias were gaily blooming in pots and boxes ranged along the balustrade. The hotel faced upon a large open square, on the edge of which was a green park with sparkling fountains, and beyond the steep roofs of the high houses on the opposite side, the deep blue summer sky was bright with stars. In the next room, of which the folding doors were open, a table was laid for four, the white cloth strewn with pink rose-buds and a large bowl full of wide-open pink roses in the centre.

All these details and all the rest of the inanimate objects escaped the observation of Reginald Grafton. His eyes were fastened upon the two ladies, young and old, who had risen to bid him welcome. He kissed the white-haired lady's hand (which held a piece of embroidery and a small pair of scissors) with deep respect, but his lips thrilled as they

touched the celebrated hand of the incomparable Leonora Bardi with a fervour going even beyond the veneration with which a devout pilgrim might salute the relic of a saint; for "La Bardi" was Reginald Grafton's sole object of worship as well as veneration.

Remenyi, the cynic, also had called her, "*La femme la plus adorable du monde.*"

Just at this moment, a door on the right-hand side of the room opened and a tall, slim girl, with a mass of soft black hair gathered into a knot on top of her head, two enormous dark and dreamy eyes, a large nose and a retreating chin, slipped into the room, and slid shyly sideways into the alcove behind her mother's chair.

"This is Bianca, my little girl, Mr. Reginald Grafton," said Leonora. The tall "little girl" advanced a few steps, made a courtesy and then retired.

Young and immature as she appeared to be, it seemed nevertheless impossible that this girl could be the daughter of the beautiful young woman, but the astute Remenyi had also remarked that, "*Ces femmes-là n'ont pas d'âge,*" like unto the goddesses of antiquity. She was dressed in a gown of soft white veiling, open at the throat, showing a slim neck, like ivory, with three rows of lustrous pearls clasped about it; and above its slender stem, a face as delicate as a fragile white flower; the face of a martyred queen.

Leonora Bardi had the same fair complexion and skin of wonderful transparency, the same hazel eyes slightly lifted at the outer corners, thin-bridged nose with sensitive nostrils; and finely chiselled lips expressing wit and a swift intelligence. No wonder the world went wild over La Bardi as "Maria Stuarda," and wept like a child at the last scene, when the white neck was about to be hacked by the brutal axe; for Leonora seemed to be a reincarnation of Mary, Queen of Scots.

Princess Olga Leuchtenberg, La Bardi's aunt, was tall and held herself erect with a stately uprightness which belied her, for she was the most approachable and kindest of women. She had rather thin white hair drawn back from a high but retreating forehead, an aquiline nose, straight mouth and a pointed chin, which when she closed her lips tight after an emphatic assertion — lifted itself aggressively.

The Princess's face would have struck one as severe in feature had it not been for an indulgent smile that usually played about her mouth and the kindly light in her blue eyes.

The waiter, Fritz, announced dinner.

During the meal, Reginald, unconscious of appetite, could not take his eyes from La Bardi. In her new rôle (to him) of mother, she seemed more fascinating even than in Rome, and he now understood why she had said to him there one day:

"In America next year, I shall play Marie Antoinette, if I can acquire enough self-control; for whenever I read of her, or think of her martyrdom, I cry so bitterly that my voice would be drowned in tears. As soon as I feel that I can make the world cry as I do (while mastering my own emotions), when I can worthily show forth the majesty and dignity of that Queen and the torture of that desolate mother (her little boy torn from her); when I can depict her, following the Way of the Cross to an ignominious death, despised and rejected like her Master — then shall I play Marie Antoinette!"

Now that Reginald Grafton had heard the story of Leonora's flight from Greifenstein and knew how much she had suffered for love of her child, he understood why her sympathy was even deeper for Marie Antoinette than for the other martyr-queen, Mary of Scotland.

The dinner was long, and the conversation lively. Healths were drunk in a bottle of champagne, not too dry because Bianca liked sweet things, and it was especially a festival for the child, who had just arrived from the convent school in England.

After dinner, they all four sat in the alcove, talking and laughing, until ten o'clock, when Bianca said good night and Leonora went away with her.

"You and my aunt can talk together for a while," she said.



Now, Reginald Grafton liked the Princess Olga very much indeed, but he was rather afraid of her. He thought she "preached" too much (which is the favourite expression of irreligious people for any allusion whatever to anything supernatural), but Reginald also enjoyed what he called "wrangling" with her over scientific philanthropy which the Princess defined as "cold-blooded cruelty to the human race." She sat back in a *fauteuil* and was smoking a cigarette. Her embroidery lay on the table at her elbow, neglected for a while, and her eyes followed Leonora in silence until the door closed behind her.

"She is a wonderful creature," asserted the Princess, waving her cigarette in that direction, "and what a mother! If Leonora had not been a lady born and bred of the true kind, now getting obsolete (for who could be a lady in a hobble skirt?): if she had begun life as a homeless wanderer or a street child, like some of the great artists whose private lives have been a moral shipwreck, and if she had not had her Catholic faith to guide her, I believe that Leonora Bardi would have kept herself straight for her child's sake alone. You don't see such maternal devotion often nowadays. It seems to be growing dim in your 'progressive' country, in consequence of loose marriage-ties and easy divorces: that is, according to the accounts one

reads in the *Paris Herald*." The Princess cast a provoking glance at him.

Reginald looked uneasy. "First of all," he said, "I suppose marriage was meant to be a social institution arranged for pleasant companionship and congenial intercourse; also, it is of course, in a way, a *moral* institution," he added, somewhat lamely.

The Princess stared hard at him with a cold light in her light blue eyes.

"And is that all?" she asked. "Do the 'progressive Americans' see nothing beyond this; nothing sacred in marriage as a *religious* as well as a social and moral institution?"

"As to that," he replied, smiling indulgently, "in my country people may do pretty much as they please. They are free to select any method they like of tying the matrimonial knot. They can have any form they wish, from Ritualist pomp and splendour in church, down to the Justice of the Peace under a tree in the garden. It is all the same."

"Is it?" sniffed the Princess. "And is the knot as easily *untied* also in either case?"

"Oh, yes," replied Reginald, but his face clouded over and he seemed embarrassed. "Divorces are granted easily in some of our States. And in others," he added, biting his lip, "only for the gravest reasons."

"And what becomes of the Christian family, I

wonder, in all this struggle after self-indulgence? Dear Mr. Grafton, with us Catholics, the cradle is the centre of the family, as the Crib of Bethlehem is the centre of the Church on earth. This reverence for the sanctity of home is true also of *devout* Christians outside, and of the *believing* Israelites, from whom we inherited the decalogue. In your 'progressive' modern world, marriage seems to have become only a selfish wrangle between two people as to which shall snatch the most pleasure out of life, if they don't happen to get along together. Of course, when they love one another, all is smooth-sailing—but there are very few real love matches in this world," and the Princess Olga sighed.

"But when husband and wife don't 'get along,'" Reginald persisted, "why on earth should they not be freed from a galling yoke? You must admit, dear Princess Olga (as some excuse for modern innovations), that marriage at the present day seldom comes up to that high ideal life for two persons which it may have been intended to be. In this twentieth century, I fear that it is most often a disappointment and a failure."

"Fiddlesticks!" exclaimed the Princess. "That means only that marriage is a failure to have one's fling and a disappointment over flesh-pots, the apparent end and aim of life in your earthly paradise."

"But, after all, one's main object in life is to have a good time in the best of worlds," declared the American optimist. "If people do not get on well together it seems to me that they had much better separate; and perhaps have another chance."

"And the children?"

"Oh, the children (when there are any) can generally be looked after by their grandmothers," explained Reginald, rather vaguely.

The Princess's laugh was scornful.

"After a few generations of vagarious 'progressive American' parents, will there be any grandmothers left, dear Mr. Grafton?" she asked.

"My mother is old-fashioned and deaf," murmured Reginald. His mind seemed to be wandering.

The Princess stared at him as she rejoined:

"But what on earth has your mother to do with the matter?"

"I — I did not tell you before," answered Reginald, leaning forward and speaking with determination; "of course I have not talked about myself, but the truth is —"

Before he could get any further, the door opened and Leonora Bardi came in.

"I must ask pardon," she said, "for my long absence; but, you see, it is my child's first night with me. After so long a separation, she had a lot to

talk about; then afterward we said our prayers together, and we had more than usual to say to the *Bon Dieu*."

Reginald, who had been growing restive under the elderly lady's insistence, and rather tired of their "wrangle" (which had led him to the brink of some information about himself which he desired and yet rather dreaded to impart), was longing to bask in Leonora's smiles. It was with a sigh of relief that he seated himself beside her at a little table in a distant corner to which she had kindly withdrawn him that he might have a moment's rest from her aggressive aunt while she showed him some photographs.

"Now," thought Reginald, "is my time for giving her the Head Forester's message," and he set about it.

"My man Hawkins," Reginald began, "met at Innsbruck last night an old man with a beard who said he was Head Forester at Greifenstein."

"What hotel did you stop at?" questioned La Bardi, evidently startled and hardly knowing what to say.

"That is unimportant," Reginald hastened to rejoin. "I must tell you in as few words as possible what happened. The facts are these. Hawkins, in the course of a conversation, told this old man that we were leaving this morning for Munich and naturally he spoke of your being here. The old

man seemed agitated. This morning he met me at the station, presented himself to me and sent you this message."

Leonora Bardi listened intently as Reginald repeated word for word what the old forester had said. Then she went very pale, shut her eyes a moment and presently said:

"I think I know what this means. I can't tell you — at least not now — about it, but I think I know."

Seeing her agitation, Reginald at once said good night.

"May I see you to-morrow?" he asked.

"No, no, not to-morrow," answered La Bardi quickly. She seemed absorbed in some thoughts far away. "To-morrow I play 'Desdemona,' and I always avoid talking on the days when I must die. On those days I give myself to the tragedy of life; for acting, after all, is only exaggerated sympathy; one not only feels with the person, one *is* the person."

. . . . .  
Reginald Grafton had a good deal to think about when he went to bed. He had quite made up his mind that on Friday (this being Wednesday) he would place himself and his great fortune at the feet of Leonora. He had known her for four months and more in Rome, seeing her nearly every day, and he had reason to believe that she cared a

good deal for him. He did not know how it was that Leonora depended upon her profession as a means of livelihood, but he knew that this was a fact, for La Bardi herself had told him so, and had sometimes said that, if she did not love the Princess Olga too well to become a dependent upon her generosity, she would leave the stage as soon as Bianca should be eighteen.

“Perhaps after all I may save enough, if I go to America next year and bring back pots of gold,” she had said once, laughing, “for, my friend, I am so weary of it all sometimes that I think my nerves can’t stand it much longer. I long to be always free, not a chained, performing animal for six months out of the twelve.”

Reginald Grafton could set her free if she would consent to be his wife; and he saw no reason why she should not accept his heart and hand, except his personal unworthiness.

## CHAPTER IX

**A**FTER her usual triumph, "La Bardi," having been smothered by Othello, was carried home exhausted as usual, like a pale lily broken down by storms of passion and applause. She slept late on the following morning, but at three o'clock in the afternoon, when Reginald had been told he might see her, he was surprised to find a fresh and alert young woman, dressed to go out.

"Take me for a walk, dear Mr. Grafton," she said, and Reginald, who was bent upon a very serious tête-à-tête interview and had asked to see her alone, was delighted.

"If you are not too tired," he added.

Leonora laughed. "My spirits are far wearier than my legs," she declared. "After nocturnal tragedies sometimes *they* are black and blue; and then I often feel that if I do not give up my art, my art will kill me. Sometimes it seems as if I might lose my wits and go quite out of my mind; for all these various impersonations take such a hold upon me, that I can hardly rid myself of them after the play is over. If ever I played the rôle of a bad woman, I believe I should become possessed of a devil. Often, too, I am haunted even in my wak-



ing dreams by multitudes that picture to me the life of the whole world: its passion and its grief. I have visions of huge crowds, I suppose because I have always before my mind the monster of many faces — of ears and eyes innumerable — which transfixes me with the whole force of its vitality, like the sun's rays upon a burning glass, and I feel that I must either break into a flame or sink into a quivering heap of ashes. That is what takes it out of me; and then I feel as if I shall *die*, if I can't get away into the fields and woods, to fill my tired lungs with fragrant air under the blue vault of Heaven!"

Leonora was quite dramatic and altogether fascinating. They walked slowly along in the direction of the *Englischer Garten* — that vast stretch of grass and trees where one may lose oneself in seclusion and forget the neighbourhood of a wide thoroughfare.

As they passed through the gate and turned aside to the right, away from the lower paths and fields where a few children were playing, Leonora stretched out her arms and drew a long breath, exclaiming:

"The hope of my life is to be able one day to give up acting forever, to belong altogether to Bianca, and, as an American lady once put it to me (a weary person with a lot of children), 'to degenerate into a mere mother'! That can only be when

I can afford it, for I never will become a burden upon my dear Aunt Olga, who has so many irons in the fire, so many arts and charities! I can't tell you my whole story, dear Mr. Grafton, but I was as rich once upon a time as she is, and then — I lost it nearly all. Never mind how. Suffice it to say that I have since become a very mercenary actress, bent upon amassing shekels — first for Bianca's marriage portion, and afterwards for my old age!"

Leonora laughed, but her beautiful face looked to Reginald infinitely pathetic. This information, however, was just what he wanted, and could not have asked for. It placed their relationship at once upon a more confidential footing, less like a casual friendship, and it gave him the assurance that it was a very great happiness indeed which it was in his power to offer to her, together with his love and devotion. They had seated themselves on a bench facing the road. Nobody was anywhere in sight, for at this hour the park was almost deserted.

The decisive moment had arrived. Reginald drew a little closer, sliding along the bench and bending his head to look into Leonora's hazel eyes. He was especially handsome that morning, fresh and manly, and with the look of innocent candour in his eyes which always reminded her of a child. His grey clothes were very becoming to his pink skin, and the Panama hat was just the right size,

cool and light; but not suggesting the picturesque, a thing which Reginald abhorred in a twentieth century man. And yet he always managed to give to his own outward appearance a personal note which kept him (while perfectly *en règle*) from looking in the least like a fashion-plate. The only commonplace thing said about him, meant as a compliment by vague but admiring ladies, was: "He is a Du Maurier!"

Reginald cleared his throat; he had already made up his mind as to what he should say:

"Signora," he began, "perhaps you will listen kindly to what I have to tell you, even if you think me presumptuous."

Reginald did not believe that, from a social point of view, there was any presumption whatever in the offer of his hand — rather the contrary. His humility was altogether personal; that of a mere mortal in the presence of a goddess. In Boston, the marriage of any member of the first families (and of the Somerset Club) to any "foreigner" whatever is looked upon *per se* as a *mésalliance*, no matter what the foreigner's rank may be; and a young man like Reginald Grafton, who was, besides, enormously rich and very good-looking, would be considered in Boston to throw himself away in marrying an *actress*, even so celebrated as La Bardi; especially in view of the fact that her mother was an opera-singer and "almost a morganatic wife"; a posi-

tion which, in America, is usually considered to be illegal, and not simply a social inequality of rank.

Reginald knew that in the Boston unprinted but uncompromising *Almanac de Gotha* his own social position was quite equal to that of any Serene Highness of any "effete European Empire or Kingdom"; so (as has been said before), his "presumption" was simply a consciousness on his part of Leonora's transcendent supremacy. In spite of a certain self-complacency, Reginald Grafton was really not a vain man. He had been long enough away from his native city to have ceased to feel that, as a Bostonian, he was a being made of different and finer clay than aught that is alien; and he loathed with all his soul that pride of wealth for wealth's sake of his parvenu compatriots. He felt that he himself was in many ways rather commonplace, in spite of his poetic and artistic tastes, and, therefore, personally unworthy even to lift his eyes to the most gifted and most beautiful creature he had ever beheld. But Reginald loved Leonora with all his heart. He had never before imagined what love could be; and his love was so high and pure that he abased himself before her and kissed figuratively the hem of her garment. Being a modern heathen, certain obstacles were for him only empty forms to be swept aside and forgotten, and it never occurred to him that La Bardi might think otherwise.

There was a long pause after he spoke; Leonora

lost in wonder as to what might be coming, and Reginald himself, although quite determined, hesitating just how to begin. At last he started, and after the first plunge, kept on quite steadily, Leonora held silent by her complete amazement.

“ You know what I think of you, Signora. I never imagined any one in the least like you. What I have called *good* women were to me unattractive, and the attractive ones were vain and selfish. Aside from your art, I have known you personally well, for so many weeks, and you and the Princess Olga have shown to me in your talk and in your lives (in everything which you have let me take part in) how beautiful and how unselfish women’s lives can be; and on the stage, of course, you are a star among starlings!” Reginald smiled at his own fancy, pleased, as Bostonians always are, when their wit sounds epigrammatic. Leonora waited in silence; wondering still what all this talk would lead up to. The infatuated Reginald leaned nearer; looking straight into her glorious eyes. The bench on which they were seated was in the shade of a spreading beech tree. It faced the carriage-road, and behind it the ground fell away in a very steep and grassy slope, ending in a deep dry ditch, which ran along the outside edge of the English Garden and was surmounted by an iron fence on the farther side bordering the Prinz Regentenstrasse. Few people were passing in the street beyond, and those few

were hidden by thick bushes planted like a hedge on the inside of the fence. In a more distant part of the park some men could be seen mowing on a hillside surmounted by a Grecian temple; but here the grass grew very thick and high, waiting to be cut.

Leonora had laid her white parasol and a blue morocco handbag down upon the ground at the end of the bench where she sat. Neither she nor Reginald were paying the least attention to anything but one another at this moment. If they had turned their heads, however, they might have seen an undulation in the long grass, as though something were crawling on its belly up the steep slope from the ditch below, and pushing its way slowly toward the bench. They could scarcely have heard any sound had they been listening, so noiseless was the progress. Even when the moving something emerged into the shorter grass, disclosing a slim, dark human form with head bent down, and no hat on it, and when a long thin arm was cautiously stretched out and an eager, claw-like hand had seized upon Leonora's blue bag, the two had still seen and heard nothing whatever. The dark form rolled itself down the slope very swiftly, one hand clutching the bag, and a moment later, an amazingly thin young man clad in black and wearing a white straw hat, walked out of the open gate of the park, a hundred yards away. Reginald had gone on speaking dur-

ing this episode (which had altogether not lasted more than five minutes). What he said was this:

"You have known, perhaps, very little about me, Signora, but you can see and know what I am, after three months' acquaintance, as well as though it were a matter of years. I have nothing to conceal. I am strong and young. I belong to a very old family in Boston, and I am shamefully rich." This was Reginald's favourite expression. He had used it to Goritzki. It described his humiliation over the one bond that united him to the American millionaire plutocracy which he abhorred.

At last Leonora interrupted him.

"Certainly, dear Mr. Grafton," she said, "my Aunt Olga and I look upon you as a very dear friend whom we can trust. You must know this already." Her eyes still said a little apprehensively, although she was smiling: "What *are* you coming to?"

Reginald now made it clear.

"I want to say to you, once for all, that my one desire is to serve you, as my one passion is to love you; and that I lay myself, all I am, all I have, at your feet, to take or to leave!"

Leonora suddenly sat up straight, her playful face grown quite serious, and a veil of pain drawn swiftly over it. So had she sometimes looked upon the stage, in moments of tragic silence which, with her, were even more eloquent than speech, when the

multitude would shout its sympathy in a frenzy of admiration.

"Does it give you pain and sorrow to hear me tell you this?" Reginald Grafton exclaimed, surprised and mortified.

"But I don't understand you!" faltered Leonora. "What does this mean?"

"Don't you really understand? Why, Leonora, it means that I ask you to be my wife. I ask you to let me set you free from all care; to go where you like, to do whatever you please, to remain an artist, acting when you will and where you choose, or to leave the stage altogether. You told me you have longed for freedom. Let me set you free!"

"Good God!" gasped Leonora. "You surely know that I am married? You have seen Bianca!"

"And heard much, before I saw her," interrupted Reginald, smiling (if Bianca were the obstacle it could easily be overcome); "but I know also that you are divorced from Count Goritzki."

Leonora's eyes blazed:

"Separated, yes; divorced, no!"

Reginald persisted, bent upon having his own way.

"The legal question could, of course, be arranged," he began.

For the first time Leonora drew away from him, saying in an icy tone:



"You forget, Mr. Grafton, that I am a Catholic. Such a proceeding is out of the question for me."

"But the Pope annuls marriages."

Reginald was obstinate. Leonora grew angry.

"Please, Mr. Grafton, do not let us discuss matters which you do not understand. If there had been any ground whatever for annulling my marriage (which simply means, that a marriage according to Catholic laws has never taken place, and therefore that a Catholic is free): if that could have been done, my marriage would have been annulled thirteen years ago, but my uncle the Archbishop declared it to be impossible. There was no case, he said."

La Bardi paused a moment, and then, seeing Reginald's misery, she pursued in a gentler voice:

"I will tell you my story, a part of it at any rate, as it is known to only three people — my Aunt Olga, Count Goritzki, *my husband*, and my uncle, the Archbishop of Milan. This confidence will prove to you how much I trust you, and what a dear and true friend I know you to be, Reginald Grafton. When I went away from Greifenstein, taking Bianca with me, I took refuge with my Aunt Olga, at her house in Florence, and we were, of course, received with open arms. She had not known, before this, the misery of my married life. Whenever she came to Greifenstein, everything

seemed to run very smoothly (you would understand what I mean did you know Count Goritzki). I had been with her in Florence only for a few days when he came there. I will make the story as short as I can. The upshot of our interview was that I gave him almost the whole of my own fortune in order to keep my child. In the presence of my uncle, the Archbishop of Milan, and before witnesses, Count Goritzki signed a paper consenting to a complete separation from me, and relinquishing all his rights over Bianca, for that pecuniary consideration! I have never seen him since. 'Now you and your child shall be mine. You will live with me,' my dear aunt cried when this was arranged. 'Not so,' I answered her. 'Now I shall be an actress, and I shall win back for my child all that she has lost.' So you see, my dear friend, I started out in my *carrière*, not as an inspired artist, full of the frenzy of poetry and beauty, but as a mere mercenary speculator — only what you call a 'pot-hunter.' And now I have almost succeeded in my quest of gold. After my trips to America next year, perhaps I shall have enough. Are you shocked at my resemblance to your abhorred American money-getters?"

Reginald could not speak. He only bent his head and kissed her hand. Leonora had become more transcendent, more wonderful than ever. First, he tried to laugh it off, as she was doing.

"I had never thought before that the gleam in your eyes was a greed of gold. You never have reminded me of John D. Rockefeller."

Then he grew very much in earnest.

"Signora, do listen to me for a moment," he pleaded. "Try to think that I am speaking as a friend, and not only for selfish reasons. I studied law after leaving Harvard, and was admitted to the bar in Boston, and although I never had to practise it as a profession, my legal knowledge has helped me in looking after my affairs, and I'm really not a bad lawyer. Whatever may be the different laws of ownership in European countries, one thing is certain: that this paper you speak of is, in one particular, like a last will and testament. If such a document is destroyed, there is absolutely no proof that it ever existed. Is this agreement about Bianca, signed before witnesses, in a perfectly safe place?"

Leonora laughed: "In a perfectly safe place," she repeated, "I keep it with my own last will and testament, locked by a spring-lock (of intricate workmanship), in a portable chest of drawers which travels with me everywhere I go."

Reginald was not satisfied.

"All the same," he insisted, "what you have told me makes me feel fully convinced that you *must* free yourself, legally and absolutely, by divorce, from Count Goritzki."

"But there is no such thing as divorce in Italy," answered Leonora. "And if there were, I have already told you that I, as a Catholic, would never consent to such a thing."

"Something ought surely to be done," persisted Reginald obstinately, "to set you free."

"But I am free!" she laughed.

Reginald looked so rueful and unconvinced that La Bardi laughed again, like a child, and all her stiffness disappeared as she said, with mischief in her eyes:

"Reginald Grafton, you seem to me to conclude, that the only obstacle in your way is my marriage!"

Reginald bit his lip and blushed crimson.

"You cannot think me such an egregious ass as to expect you to fall in love with me," he said.

"You, the most wonderful creature that ever lived, and I a mere commonplace, plodding, ordinary, modern man. I only ask to be tolerated, and you have said such kind things to me that I confess to have been full of hope that I was not insupportable."

"But that is not enough, dear Mr. Grafton. A woman too must love."

"A man worthy of your love could not exist," began Reginald and then he stopped short as though a blow had struck him full in the face. For, as he spoke, he saw a pink glow flame in Leonora's pale cheeks, and a soft light shine in her wide-open, hazel eyes. She suddenly recalled to him more vividly

than ever before the fragile and passionate Queen Mary and he remembered Remenyi's story of the young Englishman in Rome. It all came to him like a flash.

"You *love* somebody?"

It was more a question than assertion.

Leonora looked straight at him.

"I love a man," she said, "who has gone away — far away."

Reginald rose to his feet, shook himself, and put on his Panama hat.

"I love *you*, and I, too, am going far away; and without hope!"

His handsome, sunny face was woe-begone.

"You can stay, and still be my friend. We shall be so sorry to lose you."

La Bardi's voice was very kind indeed. She had taken off her gloves, and she laid one of the hands he loved upon his arm. She was also standing up and she looked wistfully into his eyes.

"I'll be hanged if I will!" Reginald cried, shaking off the hand almost rudely. "I beg your pardon, Signora, but I must go away, and I shall go home to Boston, leaving Munich to-morrow. I have been away two years now, and I have done wrong, perhaps, to have entirely forgotten my little girl."

"Your what?" gasped Leonora.

"I never told you that I have been married, be-

cause the whole affair belongs to a completely buried past, and I could not explain it without appearing to censure others. Besides, I thought if you happened to meet any one who knew me at home, you would hear all about it."

"You are a widower, then? How queer it seems, quite unnatural for you."

Leonora stared at him in amazement.

"Oh, no, I am not a widower," answered Reginald, quite unruffled. "I am divorced. Constance is Mrs. Jimmy Blake now!"

Leonora's quick mind began to grasp the situation. She could not help being amused at Reginald's complete stoicism, but she admired the nobility of his silence. Evidently his American wife had "bolted."

Reginald went on, in a matter-of-fact tone:

"I made it as easy for Constance as I could," he said. "Poor girl, she made a mistake in marrying me. She was not having nearly as good a time as she had expected. I hated clubs (except, of course, the Somerset) and races and dancing; and Constance loved to be in the swim and on the bandwagon. So one day, she bolted with Jimmy Blake, who amused her; and the first I knew of it, they were sailing away for foreign parts."

"What did you do; have them arrested?" asked La Bardi, with a twinkle in her eye.

"Good Heavens, no! I cabled to her, and ar-

ranged for a lot of money to be given her when she landed. Jimmy was hard up!"

"And then?"

"Well, after a while, they came back, and she went out West to a State where she could get a divorce from me in six months for incompatibility of temper. And then, she and Jimmy were married. The only trouble was, that she could not be considered to be his wife in any Eastern State where divorces are only granted for grave offences, of which I had not been guilty. So I, very quietly got a divorce from her in Massachusetts, more to enable her to go where she liked than for any other reason. But, of course, that divorce set me entirely free; I being what is called, 'the innocent party.' It is just the same, as far as I am concerned, as though I had never been married. Otherwise, I should, of course, not have allowed myself to speak to you as I have."

No party could be more "innocent" than Reginald looked, as he stood there gazing at Leonora with his clear, honest blue eyes, and telling his simple domestic tale. But how tragic and awful it all seemed to her. He was so absolutely blameless in this shipwreck of his life, that his philosophy was sublime.

She took his hand.

"I am very sorry," she said.

"Oh, you don't need to be," Reginald answered smiling. "It all happened eight years ago, and, of course, I did not really care so very much. Constance and I had never hit it off very well."

"But your child — her child?" Leonora had forgotten it.

"Oh, Constance left the little girl, of course. *She* had always seemed superfluous, and Constance could not have *bolted* with her, you know. Florence was only three years old at that time. My mother took charge of her, and she has had her ever since. The little girl is well taken care of, I assure you, although she may have a rather dull time. My mother is growing deafer every year and leads a very secluded life in a big country place near Boston."

"And you will go there and see the poor child, and you will write to me about her, and write often, will you not?"

And Reginald promised, trying not to show his bitter disappointment.

Only after he knew that his love was hopeless did he feel conscious of how much he had built upon it during the last three months. Now his fairy castle had crumbled into sticks and withered moss. He heaved a deep sigh and stooping to pick up the Signora's parasol he gave it to her and they started homeward.



"And my little leather bag, please," said Leonora.

Reginald looked upon the ground beside the bench.

"There is no leather bag here," he said.

Leonora turned pale. "I am sure I had it. I never go out without it," she gasped.

"And I feel quite sure that I saw it hanging on your wrist as we entered the park. Was there much money in it?"

"Oh, it is not that," exclaimed Leonora, "I never have much money about me at any time, and I should not care for that. It is my bunch of keys. I carry everywhere with me a chest such as English officers have in India and Africa. It is made in two parts and of camphor wood. The lower portion has two doors and shelves, and the upper is a chest of drawers. The top drawer has the ingenious spring and lock that I told you about and in it I keep only my will and also that document, as well as the most precious jewels that I possess. The key of it is on the same ring with the keys of the three other drawers. That bunch of keys never leaves me. I carry it about in the day-time always, and it is under my pillow at night. That bunch of keys to-day was in the inside pocket of my little bag. Where can I have dropped it?"

After a fruitless search under the tree and about the bench, Reginald and Leonora were obliged to walk slowly back to the hotel, taking exactly the

same route as when they came and examining the ground everywhere carefully in the park.

Reginald promised to notify the police and arrange for an advertisement of the loss in the Sunday *Münchener Zeitung*, offering an ample reward — far more than the bag and its contents were worth.

“Even a thief would bring it back for that,” he said, “for he would not want the bunch of keys, and that is what you are paying for.”

But Leonora was very thoughtful and sad all the rest of the day, for she recalled the old forester’s message which Reginald had forgotten.

“Don’t tell my Aunt Olga about the bag,” she said; “it would worry her.”

## CHAPTER X

“**S**O you are going back to the country of soap and water?” said Princess Olga to Reginald that evening. Leonora had told her aunt that business called him back, but nothing more as to the conversation on the bench in the *Englischer Garten*.

“Soap and water is not a bad thing, after all,” responded Reginald. “We should like to turn the hose on many ancient European places and customs, and give them a good washing out. I am sure *you* would not object,” and he glanced at the Princess, cool and trim in her plain short walking-skirt and perfectly fitting jacket, and her moderate sized black hat simply trimmed with a band and bow of ribbon; for the Princess Olga practised a very neat elegance. Her clothes were always according to her own ideas of what the fashion should be, slightly modified in sleeve or shape so as not to look out of date, but she never lowered her dignity to modern eccentricities, which follow the vagaries of Parisian vice. She answered Reginald:

“Cleanliness is a very good thing, even a privilege; for I know how hard it is for the very poor to achieve it. I have lived among them in Italy,

and my nose is not fastidious. My objection to cleanliness with a capital 'C' is, that wherever the American crusade of soap and water becomes a 'Social re-adjustment' Cleanliness usurps the place of Godliness altogether; not only superseding it but driving it out of existence. I would rather," declared the Princess, lighting a cigarette and puffing it fiercely, "be Lazarus, covered with sores and rags, *creeping* with vermin, and adoring God, than be a spick and span soap-and-water heathen, denying Him. It is better to have a clean heart and a filthy body than be a whited sepulchre with a filthy soul, not the temple of God but a play-house for the devil!"

The Princess made free use of her favourite English adjective, and she meant what she said. She read very widely upon all subjects which are agitating the scientifically humane world, buying many books and especially collecting innumerable pamphlets and newspaper-clippings in different languages on the *other* side. "Over which," Leonora said, "my Aunt Olga loves to gloat indignantly."

Reginald felt almost apologetic, in his spotless heathenism.

When Reginald Grafton took his leave the next day after luncheon, he begged Leonora not to mention his marriage and divorce to her aunt.

"Let her think as kindly of me as she can, and

please don't shock her," he begged. "You, I know, can understand, and don't look upon me as totally depraved. And I have grown even to love your faith, as you have revealed it to me. Will you sometimes write out for me one of the experiences like visions, that you still have sometimes? The Princess says they are full of fervour and poetry, and you know how I love all that is poetic, and everything that you say or feel is sacred to me."

"I will do it," answered Leonora, "if you will promise in your turn, to write to my Aunt Olga a detailed account of modern American vagaries in morals and religion, and to study them for yourself dispassionately. It will delight her, and I am sure it will do you good."

"God bless you," said Reginald, kissing Leonora's hand, "you will always be my guiding star, wherever I am, and all my life!" And he was gone.

The express train from Munich to Paris left at half-past two in the afternoon. Reginald Grafton reached the station just in time, having sent his servant ahead with the luggage; and the faithful Hawkins had attended to everything, but seemed much discouraged to find the train (which had come from Vienna) so crowded. "There's only one compartment that is not quite full, sir," he announced, "and I put your bags up in the rack. There's a lady and two gentlemen has the two window-seats and one other."

Reginald seated himself in the place next to the corridor, without especially noticing his neighbours and began to read a Munich newspaper. One of the two gentlemen went out and stood near the open door of the compartment, and the lady followed him.

"Doctor," she said, in a loud, clear voice, "they'll be announcing dinner in a minute. You'd better go ahead and engage a table for two."

"All right," he responded.

In tone and accent they were unmistakably New England voices. Reginald looked up quickly, and beheld a florid, smooth-faced man, wearing gold spectacles. He had a heavy jaw and a loose mouth with full and prominent lips, between which protruded a long black cigar, unlit. His hat was of soft felt and, like his coat and trousers, was of a vivid cinnamon brown, and he wore a bright brick-dust red scarf with a conspicuous malachite pin. His hands were thrust deep into his trousers pockets, and he shook his heavy shoulders from side to side with a swagger, as he walked away down the corridor. Reginald Grafton did not like this man's looks.

The lady came back and stood in the doorway of the compartment.

"Sumner!" she said in a decided and impressive voice to the person in the farther corner by the window, who sat in a huddled heap with his head turned away. "Sumner, you don't want to eat a three

mark fifty dinner; and you can't eat *à la carte* until after four. Now you'd best have some sandwiches, now, do you hear? I will order them!" At this moment a white-jacketed *wagon-restaurant* waiter came along and the lady promptly stopped him. Reginald now looked at her intently. She was about fifty years old, but her figure, slim and alert, appeared to be much younger than her face. She was clad in a dark blue skirt and jaunty close-fitting coat, quite bristling with black braid and buttons. On her head she wore a dark blue straw hat trimmed with a wide black ribbon and with three feathers, of the feather-duster kind, sticking up straight on the side of the crown. These feathers and her thin, sharp nose, ruthless chin and cold grey eyes (narrowed to slits and kept half closed) reminded Reginald forcibly of a Choctaw Chief; or rather of what he imagined a Choctaw Chief to be. She now came into the compartment and spoke again emphatically, as though to command attention.

"Sumner!" she said in a harder and louder tone, "the Doctor and I are going to have lunch in the dining-car. I have ordered for you two ham sandwiches, which this man will bring to you after the train starts. You will pay him fifty pfennigs, do you hear? And if you are cold, Sumner, you will wrap your coat about you, won't you?"

The lady vanished, and for the first time Reginald observed more closely the man huddled in the cor-

ner. He was a pitiful object. At first sight one would have thought him to be a very old man. He was looking out of the window, and his head was shaking with a palsy from side to side, while both hands fluttered aimlessly, never still for a second. He was dressed in a coat and trousers of black-and-white check in very small squares; he wore a black overcoat, thrown open, and on his shaking head a bowler hat was pushed rather far back.

Reginald could only see a wisp of scraggy greyish beard, the man's face being turned to the window. He wanted to get away to another compartment and smoke a cigar, but somehow the forlornness of "Sumner" aroused his human sympathy, and he really did not like to leave the poor old man alone. Presently the white-coated waiter from the *wagon-restaurant* reappeared, holding out a small package done up in white paper and demanding fifty pfennigs of the man at the window. The latter turned about, and disclosed a face very much younger than Reginald had expected, fifty rather than seventy, with the most haggard eyes glaring out of it that Reginald had ever beheld in a human head. They were like a lost dog's. These eyes were the only fixed and motionless things about him, and they stared in helpless appeal. The poor creature shook and trembled worse than ever, while he tried to propel one almost uncontrollable hand into a waistcoat pocket. After beating about for some time, it at



last dived in and produced some small money, which was poured uncertainly into the outstretched hand of the waiter who immediately disappeared. Then Reginald watched the packet of sandwiches to see what would happen next. With the same super-human efforts and failures, the helpless man at last succeeded in removing the string and paper, revealing two hard rolls, or "*Brödchen*," cut in twain with a visible slice of ham between. After trying to bite one unsuccessfully, he tumbled them on to the seat in front of him, and a moment later he suddenly got up, pirouetted about uncertainly as though giddy, and finally made a bolt for the corridor, where he stood a while looking out of the window, and then re-entering the compartment staggered back again to his seat. Reginald had resumed his newspaper, but still kept an eye upon the invalid. After about half an hour a young and heavy-looking German youth of twenty or so thrust his head in the door-way demanding to know if there was a vacant seat. Reginald was obliged to answer that there was, whereupon the young German raised aloft an immense valise made of wicker-work bound by two yellow leather straps. It was very large, very heavy and apparently too big a bag to ride comfortably in the rack. There was one valise there already, and also a leather dressing-case. The latter had been placed just above the head of the shaking gentleman.

The German youth made a lunge with his valise, roughly pushing aside the two bags, and down upon the sufferer fell the heavy dressing-case, striking him sharply on the right thigh. Instantly he got up, a perfect mass of quivering shakes, made a pirouette, with his glassy eyes glaring at the pudding face of the German youth, and then sank helplessly down again in a state of impotent and silent frenzy. Reginald Grafton, unable to contain himself any longer, suddenly broke out in his very best German: "What do you mean?" he exclaimed, "by treating this gentleman so rudely? He seems to be very ill (*sehr krank*). He is an entire stranger to me, but you have hurt him by letting fall that leather bag. What, I ask, do you mean by such behaviour?" The German youth tumbled the huge valise down upon the seat, and after an apprehensive glance at the stalwart young gentleman, left the compartment hastily, and was seen no more.

The wretched man looked at Reginald and mumbled something quite unintelligible, but it seemed to express gratitude. Reginald took refuge in a book. After an hour more, he noticed his companion diving uncertainly after the sandwiches. He was slowly crunching a dry crust ten minutes later, when the lady re-appeared after an absence of one hour and a half!

"Well, I declare!" she exclaimed. "Why, Sum, have you only just got your sandwiches?"

The poor palsied tongue uttered a few broken and incomprehensible words.

"Well, anyhow, you'd better eat them. It's all you'll get till evening, when we reach Strassburg. I wish you'd had some of that nice hot soup that we had! And such a good dinner, too."

The expression in the hungry eyes of "Sumner" might have moved a stone to pity. Reginald looked steadily at the lady and thought he never had seen a more deadly expression of dislike on a human face than on hers as she looked upon "Sumner." He seemed to detect a gleam of "Euthanasia" in it: "The painless suppression of the undesirable unit." She seemed to be the embodiment of Eugenic Humanitarianism. The genial doctor now thrust his head into the compartment. The black cigar was lighted and glowing.

"Hello," he said gaily. "How are you gettin' along?"

The wretched creature shook harder than ever and cast a look at the hale and hearty doctor like that of a wounded animal at bay.

Reginald Grafton could stand it no longer. He collected his baggage and started for the smoking compartment. But first he related to the lady what had happened, remarking that the gentleman seemed entirely helpless and might have been badly hurt if the leather case had chanced to fall upon his head. She appeared quite unmoved and Reginald added

rather insistently: "He ought really to be taken care of." At this, the lady in blue stared at him fixedly. Opening her stony eyes quite wide, she repeated:

"Well taken care of? Well, I guess he is! Dr. Brown is his medical attendant, travelling with us."

"Has your husband been ill long?" asked Reginald politely, anxious to discover if the granitic lady really was his wife, and not simply a "care-taker."

"Yes, he has, for years," she answered promptly. "It all came from working too hard at his business. Sumner was bent on making money, and he made it too!"

"Is he well enough to travel?"

"It is all the same to him where he is," she answered, shrugging her shoulders. "And the doctor and I just brought him over. I got tired of being shut up at home and I guess I deserve to have my fling like the rest of the world! I want to '*realize*' myself!"

Reginald departed and saw them no more.

He began to think that he was already acquiring material for the letters he had promised to write to the Princess Olga giving her examples of that "progressive" American world which she called "heathen." He also began to realize the accuracy of the Princess's term: for it cannot be denied that the "Young America" of this generation is dis-

tinctly anti-Christian both in theory and in practice. The progressives who utter themselves even proclaim this fact loudly and proudly.

Reginald wrote down in a memorandum book which he had bought that morning, and had not expected to use so soon, "Self Realization, or the 'Progressive' New England Wife." This would furnish material for his first letter to the Princess.

After dinner, Reginald wrote down another experience,

"In the dining-car, after leaving Strasburg, I was seated at a table with two very good-looking Americans, evidently New Yorkers, about sixty years of age. One of them was a sad man, with strong black eyebrows, pleasant eyes, and a grey moustache: the other was stout and florid, with a stiff red moustache and a gold eye-glass. Both were perfectly groomed and clothed, with an atmosphere of elegant plutocracy hovering about them. Everything belonging to them in the way of dress or ornament was expensive but not vulgar.

"The stout man announced to his friend that he had just made a 'cure' at Marienbad. He would eat no bread and went into details about his diet: no starch, no sugar, etc. Then there followed a conversation which of course I did not try to overhear, but of which scraps of sentences were wafted to me across the table, and, as their talk was in no sense confidential, I caught some of it on the wing,

in order to transcribe it for the amusement of the Princess Olga.

"The sad man said:

" 'I live most of the year in Paris now. I have an apartment there.'

" 'Yes, so I have heard,' remarked the stout man.

" 'I have brought over all my servants,' pursued the sad man, with a pathetic smile. 'They really love me: they take the best care of me. It is much less lonely for me in Paris now than living in New York. So many dear friends are gone. Since I came over this year, my oldest and best friend, Barton (you knew Barton?) has died.'

"The stout man rejoined:

" 'Oh, yes. I knew Barton very well. I saw he was dead (in the *Paris Herald* last week).' He paused a moment and then added cheerfully: 'But what a *good* death his was!' I could not help straining my ears to catch the next words, and I heard the stout man murmur, in a low and fervent voice: 'Indeed it was a *good* death, such a good death: Barton died playing golf!' The stout man nodded his head again, and then declared: 'Well, Barton led a good life, too!'

"Then there followed comments, almost whispered, which I could not catch, and the sad man ended by repeating audibly:

" 'Oh, yes, Barton was a great admirer of the best Rhine wines!'

“I have set down for the Princess already, since leaving Munich, two characteristic studies of the American ‘*Zeitgeist*.’ Even abroad one can get some idea of what is going on at home!”

## CHAPTER XI

**I**T was late in the afternoon of that same Saturday, the day of Reginald Grafton's departure.

"You seem very tired, child," said the Princess Olga, entering the room where La Bardi lay on a *chaise longue*, her hands clasped, and her eyes staring fixedly at the ceiling. Leonora and her aunt always spoke English together, because as a child La Bardi had refused to speak German, although she learned to read it. She said it hurt her throat and tired her tongue.

Italian she knew and loved best, but her English had no trace of a foreign accent. Leonora's nursery governess and three years spent at the convent in England had made it perfect: the same to her as her native tongue. In Shakespeare her voice and tone were exquisite, recalling Mojeska or Ellen Terry in the glory of departed days. Nobody in modern times could approach La Bardi. She flashed like a beautiful meteor across the sky, a pale and swift shaft of light. Her coming to London was always announced weeks or months beforehand, and the theatre invariably packed from floor to ceiling with a breathless crowd.

The question always asked everywhere she went



was: "How long will it last?" For the strain of sustained impersonation and the quiver of passionate emotion seemed as if their continual vibration would shatter the fragile human creature, who had not only to contain and control it all, but to transfer it with exquisite art from her own soul to the souls of those who hung upon her lips and her every look and gesture.

"I have not only to *live* the part myself," she used to say, "but to make every human creature in the audience live it also, each according to his receptive capacity."

Certainly her "public" was always replete and satisfied, for a pint pot may not contain as much as a magnum, but when it is full, it is just as full. All the *blasé* world, the clever and the knowing ones, as well as the fluttering butterflies of fashion; all the serious world of elderly men and women, of statesmen and soldiers; all the simple world; girls of the shops and telephone, clerks and messenger boys, laughed and cried and shouted together, as one child, when La Bardi came to London.

In Italy, France, Austria and Germany, there was also the same wild enthusiasm.

How much longer could La Bardi stand it? This was the question she asked herself very often. This year, for many reasons, her rest of three months in Rome, after a month of acting in December had not tranquillised her nor brought any

peace to her soul, as Rome always before had done; and at the beginning of this two weeks' engagement at Munich, Leonora felt quite exhausted, nervous and irritable. The days when she was not playing, she wanted to walk — walk — walk until she dropped.

Princess Olga stood looking at her. For five minutes Leonora had not moved or spoken a word. Then her aunt said again:

“You seem very tired, my child. Are you ill?”

“No,” answered Leonora, at last, still staring at the ceiling. “I am not tired, but I *see* things — dreadful things — when I want to sleep. I see jungles and tigers; and then I see lions and hyenas in a desert. I hear the crackling of branches, and the howling of beasts in a wilderness. It all frightens me. India and Africa — they haunt me!”

Her face was pale and her eyes seemed to have sunk in their orbits with a soft purple discolouration under the lower lids.

Princess Olga sat down beside her with a determined expression.

“You are thinking of *him!*” she said.

“Always,” responded Leonora, shutting her eyes.

The Princess noted the quiver of the lids, and a tear that slipped out and hung on the long lashes.

“I suspected it,” she said, “but I was not sure. That is why I sent him away.”

Up jumped La Bardi, as though galvanised into life. It was a real *coup de théâtre*. Her cheeks were crimson and her eyes blazed.

"You did it!" she cried. "You could think so ill of me?"

"Little Mary Stuart!" said Princess Olga softly. (It was one of her nick-names for Leonora.) "Little Mary Stuart," she repeated. "Your name-sake was beautiful, and slander put out its tongue at her; and temptation assailed her. She was dragged through the mire to martyrdom, and now, only after three hundred years, does the world begin to do her justice. She had no one to protect her; no one to save her from herself, if necessary."

"But what have I done?" asked Leonora almost fiercely, "that my one best friend should have been banished?"

"When one's best friend is a very good-looking young man, and when one is Leonora Bardi," rejoined her aunt with an air of determination, "it is wise to put up a barrier of separation."

"And perhaps call him 'Rizzio'?" asked Leonora bitterly.

The Princess stood her ground.

"We don't *know* any harm about Rizzio," she said. "Neither you nor I were there: nor the world that reviled, after ruthless men had brutally shed his blood. But that is irrelevant. Upon one thing I am determined, that no breath of scandal shall

taint the air around *you*; just as I have watched over the parts you play, so that no outside vileness could ever come near to you."

"This is an insult to him!" Leonora began.

"Not at all. He could not help adoring you. But when he sat there, night after night, all Rome began to talk, and the chatter reached my ears, and his too. Let me tell you the whole story, now I am about it. I sent for Lord Arthur last January. I laid the whole question before him. He is a sensible young man and he knows well that there can be no question of marriage for you while Goritzki lives. I must say, he behaved very well. He saw it all as I did, and he went away at once. He even agreed not to see you again, not to write to you. On the whole, he seemed rather elated to think that you cared so much. I made *that* clear, so as to decide him."

"Good God!" exclaimed Leonora. "Why did not you tell me all this before? I thought he was offended. I thought *he* did not care! If I had only known!"

"If you had," rejoined the Princess drily, "you might have kept him from going or have brought him back."

"How can you believe—?"

"Little Mary Stuart, little Mary Stuart! You are young and beautiful and the flesh is weak. I have never feared for you in your profession the

taint of anything common or unclean; any contamination from the promiscuous immoralities of the theatrical world. But a *grande passion* is different."

Leonora threw her arms about the Princess, and wept and sobbed a while. Then she raised to her a face so radiant and young, so transformed that Princess Olga caught her breath.

"It is all right now," cried Leonora, "now that I know."

She was a new creature, with bounding blood and sparkling eyes.

"What a happy summer we shall have! You and I and Bianca in the mountains, climbing and walking everywhere!"

Princess Olga kissed her and went slowly to her own room.

"I am glad that young man is so far away," she said. "There is no other solution."

The Princess knelt down beside her bed and prayed a while and then she wept a few tears, and wiped them away.

"The pity of it!" she said.

The newspapers next day declared that never had La Bardi played with such amazing fervour, such *Leidenschaft* and *Innigkeit* as on the previous night. They recalled the ancient traditions, which are never forgotten in Germany, of Ristori, and the

later memories of Eleonora Duse. Three days ago, when Leonora had dropped almost fainting on the stage, after the recall at the end of *Othello*, there had been predictions of nervous prostration; and now behold, she seemed to have sprung suddenly into new life and vigour.

## CHAPTER XII

### I

**F**RITZ, the waiter, had been to Mass with his mother on this Sunday morning, and was on his way home to the Russischerhof, when, in a street full of high houses, divided into cheap flats, a very strange thing happened.

Fritz looked up, as he walked along, at the heavy rain clouds, hoping for good weather, for this Sunday was a holiday for him after five o'clock. As he lowered his eyes again, something extraordinary struck upon them.

The house on the opposite side of the street was five stories high, surmounted by a steep roof, with dormer windows. At the back of every story beneath it, there was an open porch supported by pillars running down to the ground floor, apparently used by the inhabitants of each flat as a place for drying clothes.

As it was Sunday, only a few dish-cloths fluttered here and there from the cords which were stretched across the iron pillars. The stairways were inside the building, which was a corner house. The front-door opened on the street which ran at

right angles to the one where Fritz stood, looking upward.

The strange sight that halted him was two men fighting desperately in front of an open window of the fifth story, just under the roof. They were so near the edge of the window-sill, that it seemed a struggle on the part of each to thrust his opponent into the void below.

Fritz could almost hear their smothered growls, like brutes in combat. Then one of them sank suddenly out of sight, and, to Fritz's amazement, the victor sprang swiftly out of the window, catching at a water-pipe with his right hand, and from that, reached out with his left, until he gripped, as he slid downward, a clothes-line tied about an iron pillar on the porch of the story just underneath.

This performance was repeated with incredible swiftness, but, at the moment when the flying figure had reached the third story, his two slippers clattered down, striking the wall as they fell, and at the same moment a leather bag flew out of the pocket of a coat which hung from his shoulders and fell in the middle of the street below. Fritz sprang forward and picked it up. It was a morocco bag, small, blue, and gold-mounted. He felt confident that he had to do with a thief, but there was barely time for him to draw forth a card from the outside pocket, when the extraordinary being who had dropped the bag stood panting before him.



He was a young man or rather a boy, as thin as a cricket, with a straw hat on the back of his head, and a smooth pink face with white down on it, like a gosling's. His eyes were large and green, very cunning in expression. His nose was turned straight up, and an upper lip that curled out and upward, disclosed shining pink gums and a row of short white glistening teeth, pointed like a cat's. He was clad in black circus tights, with his feet thrust into the same clumsy slippers which had fallen as he climbed down. About his neck was tied a short dark coat. He looked so like the fantastic "Tyll Eulenspiegel" in an old picture-book of Fritz's childhood that the latter could hardly, at first, believe in his reality.

He was, however, soon convinced of it.

"Give me back my bag!" cried the strange creature.

"*Your* bag!" repeated Fritz, holding it tight in his left hand, while he raised the card to his rather short-sighted eyes, and read distinctly engraved upon it: "La Signora Bardi, Contessa Goritzka."

"Why, I believe you stole it," he cried in wild excitement. "It is the very bag that the Signora lost, and it was advertised in the newspapers this morning. I am a waiter at the Russischerhof, I myself will take it back to her at once."

"I never stole it; I found it!" cried the other. "Caspar Schmitt was trying to snatch it from me,

so that he should get the reward. Give it back to me!" he entreated with frantic gestures; but he did not attempt to snatch the bag, and Fritz put it into his own coat-pocket.

At this instant, a heavy-built, bull-necked man came slouching round the corner. "Don't tell him you've got it!" whispered the youth with an elfish grin. "I shall settle with you later," and, with the swiftness of a cat, the boy climbed back to the porch as far as the second story, where a red-faced woman stood smiling, who had emerged from the kitchen, and was looking down. She received him with open arms and, leaning over the balcony:

"Caspar Schmitt!" she cried to the bull-necked man, who stood underneath, red with fury, and muttering curses, "Go away and let the boy alone, do you hear? Or else I will call the police!"

Scarcely anyone was to be seen in the street except a few passers-by who beheld only the climbing boy and the smiling woman. They had no suspicion of the deadly struggle which Fritz alone had witnessed, nor had they noticed the dizzy descent, for the entire drama had lasted scarcely a hundred seconds. The heavy man shook his fist and walked away. He took no notice of Fritz, for he had not seen his meeting with the fantastic boy, and Fritz had the bag hidden away safe in his breast-pocket. As soon as he got back to the hotel, he resumed his neat black suit, stiff shirt and white tie, and after-

wards presented himself in the salon, where Princess Olga and Leonora were seated, having just returned from High Mass. Fritz stood a moment in hesitation at the door, and then advanced, holding out the bag upon a silver salver.

"Gnädige Frau," he said, "I have found this bag which belongs to the gracious lady herself, as I saw by the visiting card therein contained."

Fritz spoke a kind of English which was a literal translation of his own German tongue, and he was quite proud of having served in London for a year, at the Hyde Park Hotel.

Leonora uttered a cry of delight as she seized the bag and the Princess Olga looked much surprised.

"I did not know that it was lost," she said.

"No, dear," answered Leonora, "I did not wish you to know, because it would have worried you. My keys were in it." Hastily opening the bag she took out the bunch of keys in triumph. "There they are, quite safe." Then turning to Fritz, who was standing near the door. "Here are the twenty marks which were in the bag," she said, "and I owe you eighty more, for the reward offered was one hundred marks."

"Pardon me, gracious lady," answered Fritz resolutely. "The now departed gentleman said yesterday morning that the so large reward was offered in order to induce the thief the bag to return. Now,

I the thief have caught, to prevent that he the reward shall become."

Upon being asked to explain, Fritz gave a vivid description of the scene at which he had assisted.

"It sounds like a pantomime," said Princess Olga, "Harlequin, Pantaloon and a stout Columbine."

But Leonora became very thoughtful. "It is uncanny," she said; and then, turning to Fritz; "I understand your feelings," she observed, very kindly, "but please accept the twenty marks, and spend that amount on some pleasure."

Fritz's face beamed. "I thank many times the gracious lady, and to-night I my mother to the circus shall escort where she so much wants to go."

"Is there a circus in Munich?" asked Princess Olga.

"A travelling show has come up from Italy, Durchlaucht," answered Fritz, "and it has a tent outside the town; not far from the Thiergarten."

After Fritz had left the room, the Princess remarked, with decision: "I like that young man. He is very neat, intelligent and thoroughly honest, and he waits well at table. I have been thinking that he would make a very useful travelling servant for us, when we go to America. You will have your private car there, and both on the train and in hotels, he would be very useful, to be always be-

tween you and the crowd. His speaking English has made me think of it."

"It is a very good idea," said Leonora.

## II

The circus was packed with an eager crowd of Sunday spectators. Fritz and his mother got seats quite in the front row next to the ring, where two rows of benches had been placed, more comfortable than the tiers around the sides of the big canvas tent. Fritz's mother's face was shining with delighted expectation, and the satisfaction of remembering that even the best seats were only three marks. The special feast of *linsensuppe* and boiled beef and cabbage, followed by *Dampfnudeln* had cost two marks each, so that the entire entertainment had taken only half of the Signora Bardi's gift.

Toward the end of the first part of the performance, as announced upon the programme, "that wonder of the world, the Human Snake, will display some of his incredible feats of contortion."

Fritz's mother wondered if it could be a real snake, with a man's head, but Fritz explained that *Schlange-Mann* probably meant a person who could crawl about or twist himself into serpent-like postures.

No. 5 arrived. Two acrobats who had just finished their act came back into the ring, kicking a

rather large ball, alternately, in front of them and each carrying a solid wooden chair. They placed the two chairs with backs facing each other, about two feet apart. Then one of them, kicked the ball again into the middle of the ring, and the two acrobats stood on either side, ten feet away. The ball flew open, and out sprang (unrolling itself) a slim human form all in white with pink silk trunks. It put one hand on either chair, and then began a series of contortions so swift and so extraordinary, that one could not see its face or arms or legs distinctly. Next, it sprang up to one of the trapezes which hung overhead, and began to swing by the heels, and then leap from one to the other, with the same amazing celerity. This went on for a quarter of an hour. The creature was not still for a second, and the heads of the spectators were swimming.

Fritz's mother felt quite giddy, and put her handkerchief to her face, and Fritz, laughing, shut his eyes for a moment. When he looked again, the Human Snake was standing quite still on the sawdust of the ring. He was in the act of bending slowly backwards, his feet apart, and a glass of water between them on the ground.

Fritz's mother uncovered her face and shuddered, as she saw the snake-like body curving slowly, apparently boneless. Presently the head appeared behind the legs, advancing and looking down-

ward until it came to a pause between the ankles, just above the glass of water. Then the face raised itself and grinned pleasantly at the spectators; a round-eyed, cheerful countenance, with a turned-up nose and smiling mouth. As the teeth seized the rim of the glass of water and raised it up, the green eyes looked straight into Fritz's eyes, and one of them winked. Fritz recognized the *Schlange-Mann*, and he knew that the *Schlange-Mann* had recognized him.

## CHAPTER XIII

**F**RITZ and his mother stopped to have their habitual "*Abendessen*" at a modest place not far from the circus. This supper was, as usual, to be beer and *Bratwurst*. The place was quite full of people, and already smelt of the hot sausages which were brought in sizzling by two red-cheeked damsels.

Fritz and his mother found a table in a corner.

They had scarcely taken their seats, when a voice said, "May I sit here? I want to speak to you," and to Fritz's consternation, the *Schlange-Mann*, leaning a cane against the wall (upon which he hung his straw hat) slid into an empty chair at the table. He had on grey trousers, and a light overcoat buttoned to the chin. A red silk handkerchief was tied about his neck; there evidently was no shirt collar. Fritz's mother, who had supposed the stranger to be a friend of her son, suddenly recognised the Human Snake and almost shrieked aloud. Fritz had risen in wrath and was preparing to eject the intruder, when the latter put out a propitiatory hand.

"Gnädige Frau," he said, addressing Fritz's



mother as though she had been a lady. "Pardon my coming into your presence. I hope it is not unpleasant to you that I speak for a moment to your son?"

His voice was so agreeable to the ear, and his eyes looked so frank and appealing, that the good old woman at once overcame a certain creepy feeling in her back-bone and answered, "Certainly, sir, you may speak to my son, if you wish."

Fritz was dubious. He recalled the fantastic creature, with cunning eyes, who had dropped the Signora's bag and had tried so hard to get it back again; and the gruesome face (between its own ankles) that had winked at him an hour ago. But he remembered also that not a coin was missing in La Bardi's bag. While he sat down again, uncertain, the Snake Man turned to him, and said quietly, "I owe you an explanation as to what took place this morning. I will begin, however, by telling you something about myself, so that you may believe me to be a respectable and credible person. My name is Nepomuc Swoboda, and my father is Head Forester at a castle in Bohemia."

"How do you come to be — what you are?" asked Fritz's mother, eagerly curious.

The young Snake Man, with his yellow hair and pink face and his ingratiatory smile, had already won the old woman's confidence, and, in spite of himself, Fritz was beginning to soften.

"I was the youngest of ten children," explained the youth, "and I was born before my time. They thought I would not live, but I pulled through.

"I was a delicate child, nevertheless, and my father and mother were told to let me be always out of doors. The Herr Graf, the kindest man that ever lived, spared no expense that I might be a healthy child. When I was two years old, I was just like a monkey in agility, for I learned to walk on my hands before even that I walked on my feet. I lived all day long in the trees, even the very top branches. It frightened my mother dreadfully, but I never had a fall.

"When I was six years old, however, I began to climb also the rocks; and boasted that I should soon be able to scale the precipice on which stood the Schloss. This made my mother quite frantic, for I was a mischievous child at that time." Nepomuc smiled. He looked very full of mischief still. "At about this period, an aunt of mine (a sister of my mother) came to make her a visit. My aunt's husband was a well-known acrobat and rider at the circus in Vienna.

"He performed marvellous feats on horseback, and was renowned. When my aunt saw me and what I did, 'Give the child to us, Josephine,' she begged. 'We have no children. He will be as our own child, and he shall become a wonder-child in our profession.' 'You will break his neck,' said

my mother. 'He is far more likely, from what you tell me, to break his neck here at home, and that speedily,' declared my aunt. My father quite agreed with her. He said my mother was wearing herself to pieces worrying about me, and that if I did dash out my brains (which seemed only too likely), he would have to uproot the whole family and leave the Schloss, where he and his father and grandfathers had been Head Foresters. After all, my father told my mother, it would only be as though I were away at school, as my brothers had already been; and my sisters to a convent school, which taught them to read and write and sew. I should come home for a holiday every now and then, my aunt promised.

"The Herr Graf thought it a good idea. At that time he was in much trouble. I did not learn this until afterwards. Well, I went away, very happy. My aunt and uncle were very kind to me and careful. He began soon to carry me about in the ring, and how I loved it! I stood on his shoulders and on his head, as the horses galloped bareback, and at the end he would toss me in the air, and I turned somersaults as I came down, and tumbled away, with the great crowds shouting and clapping their hands. I cried when I got too big for that, and when I was told I should not be a rider; for my uncle had discovered that owing to

the softness of my bones and my extreme skinniness, I might become a marvellous contortionist and performer on the trapeze. That I am! They call me the 'Snake Man,' and also the 'Bird Man,' sometimes, to vary the programme. I am a success, beyond a doubt, but I do not earn yet as much money as I want. I love money," Nepomuc pursued, with a wide grin, which disclosed his pink gums and white teeth, while his eyes gleamed green like a cat's, in the glare of the electric light. "And I am hoping to go to New York next year; for America is the land of gold, and I should get much higher pay there. My father would be proud of me then. Now he is ashamed!" the Snake Man added bitterly, "although I have had as good an education as my eldest brother, who is in a bank, and better than the other ones. There was plenty of time for that, you see. I never was allowed to get over-tired, and only an hour or two a day was given to my training, and as to performing in the ring, that was pure pleasure.

"My uncle and aunt were very careful of my health, and to-day at nineteen, I am perfectly well and strong. Everybody says there has been no one at all to be compared to me, except the Roumanian Wunderkind, Helène Petrosçu, who was the marvel of Europe and England twenty years ago. I too have been to England, and next year I go to

America. I have told you so much, Gnädige Frau, because I owe an explanation to your son and he owes me an apology."

"I beg your pardon," said Fritz promptly.

"What is it all about?" cried his mother. Fritz explained, and then he asked Nepomuc what was the meaning of the fight he had witnessed.

"Oh," answered the Snake Man, "that was only Caspar Schmitt, the man with the iron jaw. He saw the bag and read the advertisement in this morning's paper in my room, and he wanted to get for himself the one hundred mark reward."

"And *you* wanted it," Fritz exclaimed in spite of himself.

"Not at all," responded Nepomuc with offended dignity. "I meant to return the bag to La Bardi, the beautiful actress. I wanted to see her and have her speak to me."

"But," persisted Fritz, "why did you not return it at once then? Her card was in the bag."

"It must have been hidden in the outside pocket. Besides, I had no time to go yesterday," rejoined Nepomuc quickly, with a twinkle in his green eyes.

Fritz remembered that the card was, as a matter of fact, in the outside flap, and might have been shaken into prominence by the fall.

"Where did you find the bag?" he asked. Nepomuc looked him straight in the eye.

"I found it," he said slowly, "in the *Englischer*

*Garten* on last Friday afternoon, near the gate of the Prinz Regentenstrasse. It was lying in the middle of the road, and no one was in sight."

Fritz felt quite satisfied. His old mother was charmed with the boy (he looked even younger than nineteen) and almost forgot about his backbone and other peculiarities.

Nepomuc took out a beautiful gold watch. "It is getting late," he said, "and I must go home. My uncle and aunt have taken a little flat in the building where you saw me; my own room is on the fifth floor. We shall be two months longer in Munich, and then go back to Vienna." Having observed the admiration of his watch in the round eyes of Fritz's mother, Nepomuc detached it from the chain and handed it to her. "A present from the Herr Graf on my eighteenth birthday. See the N.S. in monogram and the date!"

"What is the Herr Graf's name?" asked Fritz's mother.

"That I must not tell," answered Nepomuc. "A great nobleman in Bohemia would not care to be mentioned as the patron of a *Schlange-Mann*!" He laughed merrily and said good night.

"*Ein guter Kerl*," said the old woman, as Nepomuc disappeared; and Fritz quite agreed with her.

Fritz was on service the next day in the out-of-door Restaurant, a terrace that opened upon the

street and was served through the long dining-room, from which he had just emerged carrying a large dish, with a picturesque arrangement of brown bread and pumpernickel cut very thin, and light scrolls of butter with thick slices of yellow cheese in the centre; when he saw a slim, dark figure standing just outside the iron railing bordered by pots of green plants that divided the café from the pavement.

As Fritz came nearer in order to pass his dish to the guests at a round table near the railing, a voice murmured softly in his ear,

“When may I come in to see you and where?”

After Fritz had carried away the tray of bread and cheese and set it down on a serving table, he approached the entrance on the street where Nepomuc was waiting. “I shall be finished in ten minutes,” he said, “and then I shall eat my own dinner. Come to the side door where I will meet you, and you can talk to me while I eat. Have you dined?”

“Oh, yes,” answered Nepomuc, “I have eaten all I am allowed to have. I am kept on a rigid diet, you know. I will join you in ten minutes.”

Half an hour later, Nepomuc was seated beside Fritz in the servants’ dining-room. They were enjoying each other’s society and had already arranged to meet on the following Sunday, when Fritz would be free in the early afternoon from three to six.

"You have a fine place here," said Nepomuc. "This is a very good hotel; old but renovated. By the way, the renowned actress, La Bardi, whose bag I found, lives here, I think you told me."

"She stays until next week," answered Fritz. "Her engagement ends on Saturday. They want me to give notice here, and they will engage me at once as a courier-servant and will take me to America in January. I should like to go were it not for my poor mother, who hoped to keep me in Munich until November. However, she says it is a good place, and such good and certain pay, that she has consented, and even urges me to go. Besides," concluded Fritz, "the Signora and the Durchlaucht, her aunt, are the loveliest ladies, and the most noble that I have ever seen."

"Are they?" murmured Nepomuc, and his eyes seemed to grow greener as he half closed them. "She, the 'Bardi,' was glad to have her bag back, I suppose?" he added.

"Delighted," answered Fritz. "She seemed more pleased about the keys in it than anything else. She shook them before her aunt's eyes and said she had not mentioned the loss of the bag to her because the keys were in it. You see, it is a camphor-wood chest that they open; which has little drawers in it, and one of them has a complicated spring lock. Her maid showed it to me one day. She says that the Signora keeps all her valuable things there in-



stead of in a trunk; and she even sleeps always with those keys under her pillow. So the maid said (when I told her about it): 'No wonder that the Signora is pleased to have back the keys. It would have been a hard job for a locksmith to make others; and she would have had to empty the chest of drawers and send it out.' So you see," finished Fritz, "it was a good thing to find that bag. And this makes me remember that the Signora gave me the twenty marks which were in the bag, as I refused the reward. Now that I know about you, it seems as if you should have that reward for yourself — or at least half of it." Fritz remembered that ten marks had already been spent on the dinners and the circus.

"My dear friend," exclaimed Nepomuc, "that is all right. Keep the money! So long as Caspar Schmitt did not get it I am entirely satisfied."

"Is he your mortal enemy, this Caspar Schmitt?" asked Fritz.

Nepomuc laughed and shook his head. "Not at all," he answered, "but Caspar gets furious when I tease him, and perhaps that is why I like to torment him. There is really no harm in old Caspar."

"But he seemed to be trying to throw you out of the window when I looked up."

Nepomuc laughed merrily. "Was that what

you thought? On the contrary, he was trying to keep me from jumping out. He had locked the door, and he knew that I could climb down outside just as easily as to go down the stairs."

Fritz looked at Nepomuc and shivered, thinking that he was certainly uncanny, different from any human being he had ever before laid eyes upon. And then, seeing the delicate form and long pale hands and the pink face so young and guileless, Fritz's repulsion melted into pity; and the two parted soon afterward like dear friends who had known each other a long time.

Beyond the salon which was in the centre of the hotel, just over the front entrance, Leonora and the Princess Olga had a suite of four bedrooms running along the corridor to the right. Their maids slept on the opposite side. The room next to the salon and opening into it was the Princess Olga's. It was separated from Leonora's by two bathrooms which had been arranged in the old hotel within a few years by cutting a small room in two by means of a partition running lengthwise, and dividing the one window just in the centre. This window had been replaced by an immovable pane of ground glass in each bathroom, above which, there was a small sash (like a narrow transom over a door), which could be swung open on a pivot, by pulling a cord, and was ten feet from the floor. Outside, was the

wide balcony that ran across the front of the Princess Olga's bedroom, which had double glass doors giving access to it.

Leonora's room had a door of communication with the fourth and last bedroom of the suite, where Bianca slept on the nights when her mother played. On other nights she slept in one of the two beds in Leonora's room, where only the clothes of every-day life and the camphor-wood chest which held her jewels and lace and private papers were permitted to remain.

Every bit of "theatrical millinery," as Leonora called it, was in a room next to the maid's.

It was half-past ten o'clock on Monday night. Leonora's maid had just said good night and gone away. She herself, ready for bed and wrapped in a light silk gown, with white slippers on her bare feet, opened softly the door of communication where Bianca lay fast asleep, leaving it wide open.

Leonora then said her prayers, placed under her pillow a rosary and the little bunch of keys, pushed far away the lace-covered red silk feather-bed which even in June is considered indispensable in Germany, and then, with a sigh of pleasure, after the hard evening's work, she lay down and sank at once into a dreamless sleep.

A night-light flickered in one corner of the room, placed in a saucer behind the green porcelain stove, for Leonora hated darkness. The two doors were

open which led on to the balcony, but the heavy iron Venetian blinds that ran in a groove and made a horrid noise when raised or lowered had been let down to within an inch of the floor.

Leonora had been asleep about four hours when she awoke with a sudden start that made her heart flutter. "What is the matter?" she called aloud.

"It is I," answered Bianca from the next room. "I called you to ask what you are doing."

"I! I was fast asleep, my dear child."

"Then you must have been walking in your sleep, mamma dear, for I saw a shadow moving about your room. It was thrown upon the ceiling by the ghost light." (This is what Bianca always called the night-light. She said it was to keep ghosts away.)

Leonora sprang up and switched on the electric light. It blazed in the chandelier in the middle of the ceiling. Bianca, muffled in a Japanese dressing-gown covered with flying storks on a blue ground, appeared in the doorway at the same moment; her eyes wide open, and her curly black hair standing on end as though fright had lifted it.

"I am scared out of my wits, mamma! Please let me come in and sleep by you!"

"You are a silly child, Bianca. You must have had a nightmare. All is quiet here, and I have been asleep in my bed all the time."

"But I saw through the doorway something dark moving in your room. I thought I heard a rustle of papers and a shadow thrown upon the ceiling seemed to be bending over your camphor-wood chest. I waited a few minutes, and then I got frightened and called to you."

Leonora had put on her white silk dressing-gown and thrust her feet into the satin slippers at the bed-side. "We will examine into this vision and set your mind at rest," she said decidedly.

Together they searched every corner, of Bianca's room first, and then Leonora's. The iron shutters made the windows as impregnable as the walls of a fortress, and the rooms were absolutely empty. Leonora laughed.

"If your intruder cast a shadow he could not have been a ghost; yet we find no one under the beds or the sofas. Now we shall look in the bathroom."

But the bathroom, the door of which was ajar, was also tenantless. The small transom-sash was open.

"Perhaps it was a cat and got out there," said Leonora laughing. "Nothing else could," she added.

Bianca's mind was relieved, but she was still puzzled. "The shadow was near the desk," she persisted, "and I saw it all the same."

Leonora went to her bed-side and lifted the pil-

low. The bunch of keys lay there as usual. "Poor little Bianca," she said. "You are beginning to *see* things, as I did long ago, and to fancy that they are real, when it is only your imagination. The day is almost dawning. Say a prayer, and go to sleep again, dear child."

And Bianca obeyed.

## CHAPTER XIV

COUNT GORITZKI sat at his writing-table in "the den" at Schloss Greifenstein. Above the projecting shelf, on which were his writing materials, the doors of the cabinet were thrown wide open, disclosing a double row of small drawers with an open space between, and one wide drawer below. The latter had a curious padlock, arranged evidently for greater security, and the other drawers had no keyholes, only round wooden knobs. Nepomuc Swoboda sat on a chair beside Goritzki, holding his straw hat in his left hand. He had just seated himself at his master's bidding, and leant forward talking eagerly.

The "Snake Man" poured forth his tale with many gestures and descriptive undulations, while Goritzki smiled and nodded his head now and then, as though to say: "Well done!" "And only think, Herr Graf, that I got at what I wanted only by asking questions, and did not have to make a duplicate key from the wax impression that I took before giving up the Signora's bag," concluded Nepomuc, as he slid a long right hand into the breast-pocket of his short sack-coat, and drew out an official looking document signed and sealed.

Standing upon his feet, he handed it to his master, with a bow such as he was used to make at the circus after a particularly wonderful performance; a self-complacent bow.

Goritzki scarcely glanced at the folded document.

"Where is the envelope?" he asked.

"Erlaucht, I left that behind on purpose. I put into it a folded piece of blank paper which I had brought with me, so the packet looks just as it did before. Nobody would suspect, unless they opened it and took out the contents, that anything had been touched."

While he spoke, Goritzki gazed at Nepomuc with frank admiration.

"Bravo!" he exclaimed. "Even I had not thought of that. You are far cleverer than I imagined, my good fellow. Your brain is as serpentine as your body."

Nepomuc squirmed with pleasure at these words from his adored master. They encouraged him to say, with a propitiatory smile:

"The Erlaucht thinks, then, that I have earned the reward — the ten thousand crowns?"

"Amplly, and you shall be paid even more, perhaps; but not just yet, my good friend"—and Nepomuc was content. He not only worshipped his idol, but trusted him.

It was Sunday morning, and the soft sound of distant church bells mingled with Nature's hymns,



sung by a multitude of tiny voices; the crickets, tree-toads and grasshoppers trying to make as much noise as the birds, and certainly keeping it up longer.

Goritzki's thoughts were not in unison with this universal song of praise to God. He was very busy calculating chances and constructing circumstances for the profit and advantage of the one being whom he magnified, himself.

"You say that you left everything exactly as it was before?" he asked at last, raising his head.

"Yes, Erlaucht!"

"I should suppose," pursued the Count, "that anybody looking into that drawer you spoke of would be satisfied, upon seeing the envelope, that nothing had been removed. At least, we may entertain that supposition, and await developments.

"I have decided to do nothing further until they shall come back next spring with a golden harvest from America."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth, when Nepomuc, who had ears like a fox, sprang with a bound to the open window:

"Papa!" he cried, leaning out, "what are you doing?" and immediately the head and shoulders of the stalwart old Head Forester appeared framed in the opening. He was standing on a ladder, and held in his hands a pair of pruning-shears. His head was bare and his face very red.

"Good morning, Erlaucht," said the old man,

trying to speak in a steady voice and with a side-glance at his grinning son, which seemed to express regret that the day for spanking had gone by.

"You nearly made me tumble off the ladder; you startled me so, you idiot!" he growled in an undertone.

"It is not high enough to hurt you, Papa," rejoined Nepomuc, with an expression of elfin glee. "I heard a noise outside, and only wished to discover what it was."

Goritzki hurriedly slipped the stolen document into a large blue envelope and put it far back in the open drawer, closing and locking the padlock. Then he came swiftly to the window, saying angrily: "What on earth are you doing here?"

"Only trimming the vines a little," answered the old forester steadily, who had recovered his *sang-froid*. "The Herr Graf complained yesterday that the long branches hang over the windows and obstruct the light, so I just thought I would prune them myself, and I was snipping off from below a few of the longest in order to clear this heavy curtain away from the Erlauch's window altogether. It is only the ampelopsis which grows again so fast (not the ivy) that interferes with the light." The old forester seemed very loquacious, as though anxious to leave no room for further questions. He backed down the ladder, when he had finished, picked it up and carried it away.

When Goritzki saw the old man's back receding near to a neighbouring tool-house and conservatory, he questioned Nepomuc in ill-suppressed fury:

"Was your father eavesdropping?" Nepomuc smiled slyly.

"He had no time, Erlaucht. His foot was only on the lowest rung of the ladder when I first heard him. If he could overhear anything at all, it was only that last sentence about next spring."

Goritzki's tense face relaxed.

"*That* could convey no information without the context. Now you may go. I suppose you return to Munich?"

"At two o'clock, Erlaucht. I perform at the Circus at half-past nine."

"Good luck," said Goritzki kindly, putting out his hand. Nepomuc knelt and kissed it. "Be sure that your father finds out nothing; I can't trust him, except with the affairs of the estate. Personally, he has never been my friend."

Nepomuc's eyes looked green.

"He is *her* friend," he hissed. "He would have himself hacked in pieces for La Bardi!"

"We shall not give him the chance," laughed Goritzki.

. . . . .

When Nepomuc had departed, his master sat still for a while, thinking, but his face was now bright,

a pink colour was in his cheeks and his black eyes glittered.

"I shall play with her, like a cat with a mouse," he said in glee, opening and shutting his lithe white fingers. "She may run a while, but she can't escape me now; and I can drive a much harder bargain than I did before. But I shall wait until she comes back from America. The Signora may then be glad enough to hand over to me her golden harvest, brought from the new world, as the price of Bianca Goritzka. She prefers her daughter to her ducats, and I," Goritzki slipped over to the piano and sat down upon the stool with his fingers on the keys, "I will take the ducats every time. We shall see, should the divorce law be passed in Italy this year, whether I shall not enjoy all the privileges of freedom and marry the Soap-King's widow!"

He ran his fingers in light arpeggios up and down the keyboard, singing the while in a soft recitative:

"Fortune shall smile upon me, and perhaps 'Erni' Greifenstein, my beloved cousin, will find his expectations of inheritance a mere idle vision, a Fata Morgana Paradise."

Goritzki then burst forth into rapturous song — Italian rapture: "*Bel Idol mio*," "*Celeste Aida*." Phrases like strings of pearls set in golden tones (with no defacement of French nasals or German

gutturals to mar the melody) poured forth from his quivering throat, making the very air throb in sympathy.

## CHAPTER XV

**T**WO weeks had passed since the close of the Munich engagement, and Leonora was free: nothing more to do until January, when she and the Princess Olga should sail to America for a three months' engagement.

According to the contract, the newspapers said, she was to be paid more than any artist had ever received, except Melba and Caruso, and the admission charged was to be as much as for grand opera performances.

Goritzki read this announcement with much internal satisfaction, as he sat alone at Greifenstein.

. . . . .

On a cloudless day in July, the Princess Olga, Leonora and Bianca sat under the trees by the lake at the Villa Bardi. The garden was still beautiful and fresh, although the weather was growing very hot. Scarcely a ripple stirred the blue waters of Lake Como.

Leonora, in a white jacket and short skirt, with a broad white hat shading her face, looked as young and as fresh as a girl. She was sitting in a large wicker armchair, with cushions of cretonne in a

pattern of green leaves and white flowers tangled together. Bianca, without a hat, and dressed in a light blue frock with white lace at the wrists and throat, sat cross-legged on a cushion in the grass, with a writing-block on her knees and a pencil in her hand, with which she wrote at intervals.

The Princess Olga, seated in a garden chair facing the other two, looked placid and cool in a rather stiff costume of black voile over white silk, and upon her head was a trim turban hat; black with a white ostrich plume. She and Leonora were going for a drive in half an hour, and they had all three just finished their tea.

Leonora held an open letter in her hand.

"How many times have you read Reginald Grafton's letter?" asked the Princess, "I should think you must know it by heart."

"You got it two weeks ago," said Leonora, "but that was when I was worn out with work and packing and saying good-bye to everybody. I could not really enjoy reading it until we came here."

She raised the letter as she spoke, and scanned its pages. It was long, and covered several sheets closely written.

"How very amusing it is to think of his having begun so soon his observations upon modern America, and how kind he was in the train to the poor sick creature, not to leave him alone. How absurd in the midst of its pathos is the account of

that rich broken-down American with the up-to-date wife, like a Choctaw Chief."

"I should like to beat her with a stick!" said the Princess, rapping a stout parasol on the hard ground.

Bianca looked up from her writing.

"I think the sad man and the stout man are so funny," she said; "saying how 'good' and 'beautiful' it is to live drinking Rhine wine and to die playing golf!"

Bianca was both pious and poetic.

"Only think, Mamma, to live and to die like that! It is really tragic, but it makes me to laugh also."

"You seem to be pining, both of you, for Reginald Grafton," remarked the Princess, a trifle snappish.

"But you miss him, too, dear Aunt Olga?"

"I don't deny it, but I'm not *pinning*."

"You see," pursued Leonora, smiling, her hazel eyes growing soft, "he is not only so good to look at (as Bianca says), but he is good through and through." Leonora's smile grew tender. "He is, I think, the most honourable man I ever knew, and the most unselfish, too, in spite of his apparently sybaritic existence. In Rome, he talked to the beggars in a weird Italian, and a lot of poor people knew him, and used to smile when they saw him. I noticed this when sometimes we walked together on the Pincio and down the steps to the Piazza di



Spagna, and Father Smith, the English priest whom he met at the Saltieris, told me that Mr. Reginald Grafton had given him a lot of money for some charities he had heard him speak of. Father Smith said, 'That young American gentleman is a good Catholic at heart, although he calls himself a *heathen*.'

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed the Princess, arching her eyebrows and elevating her sharp chin. "You never told me all this before!"

"I was thinking of other things, I suppose," said Leonora evasively; "but now that Reginald Grafton is gone away, all these memories come back to me," and she sighed.

"H'm!" grunted the Princess. "With you, the French proverb is reversed of 'The absent are always wrong.' Your geese all become swans after they fly away."

Leonora cast upon her aunt a reproachful glance.

"Sometimes it is no laughing matter, dear," she remonstrated.

"I wonder!" mused the Princess.

"What do you mean?" asked Leonora, quickly, with narrowed eyes.

"I mean," said the Princess Olga, leaning forward with a side glance at Bianca, who, however, was scribbling busily upon her block and apparently not listening, "I mean, I think you are very quick in sympathy and imagination. Perhaps sometimes

you exaggerate your own emotions, and you make yourself suffer. And sometimes I, myself, am deceived by these outward appearances, and see perhaps more emotion on the surface than there is underneath."

Leonora bit her lip, and the pupils of her eyes grew hard and black.

"That sounds most decidedly," she said, "as if you can think that I am always *acting*. You know very well that I can be in earnest, dear Aunt Olga, and can suffer, too," and the veil of pain fell across her face, which drew tears always from at least a thousand eyes.

"Little Mary Stuart!" began the Princess, her own eyes quite dim.

"Oh, please!" protested Leonora. "Spare me that name for once. When you call me 'Mary Stuart,' you always seem to imply that I am fickle. I am not. Nor was she for that matter."

The Princess resumed, in a more matter-of-fact tone:

"You have many adorers, my dear, who would be suitors if they could; and sometimes I wonder which of them you would really care for, under other circumstances."

"You know which, you even said you did — the other day in Munich. Please, Aunt Olga, don't tease me so."

Leonora's eyes grew hazy, and her sensitive

mouth began to twitch. This time, it was such real emotion, not acting at all, that the Princess got up and bent over her, putting an arm about her.

"Dear child," she said, "I would not hurt your feelings for the world. I only was amused to see that you seemed to be so very interested in Reginald Grafton since that last day, when you came back from a walk with him and told me that he was a widower and had a little girl."

"I said he had 'lost his wife.'"

"That is the same thing, of course," rejoined the Princess. "How funny that he did not tell us before that he is a widower!"

"Are you two talking about Mr. Grafton?" broke in Bianca, looking up from a fit of abstraction, with her pencil in the air.

"We are."

"He is a dear. I love him, and I tell him so," exclaimed the young girl, with her dark eyes wide open and a bright flush in her cheeks.

The Princess laughed.

"You must be careful when you grow up," she said, "not to turn the heads of old and young men by such declarations."

Bianca laughed.

"He cares more for Mamma," she asserted. "If mamma ever marries again, I think it will be Mr. Grafton."

Leonora cast a woeful glance at the Princess. Both women felt as though a knife had stabbed them. Bianca had, up to this time, been allowed to believe that her father was dead. No one, indeed, could have explained things to her without making awful revelations with regard to Goritzki, and so they had let it be. Her nurse had once told Bianca, when she asked about him, that her father was dead, and thereupon the child said, "I should like to see his grave and put some flowers upon it." The nurse had explained that the grave was in Galicia, far away. "When I grow up, I will go there," the child had said. The faithful nurse (now Bianca's maid), the same one who had carried the child away from Greifenstein, shuddered at the words, and wondered often since what would happen when her dear Bianca should discover the truth, as she might do at any time now. The Princess Olga and Leonora to-day shuddered also, but Leonora spoke lightly, trying to laugh:

"Mamma is never going to marry again, dear. She is doubly wedded already to her art and to her big child."

"Sometimes I wish you would," said Bianca; "you seem so sad, my beautiful mamma."

"I am never sad when you are with me, my dear, so please do not be in a hurry to leave me, for that is the only thing that can separate us."

"I shall never marry!" declared Bianca. "I should like to have adorers, but never to choose among them."

"Poor things," remarked the Princess. "How they would suffer while you enjoyed yourself. It would be like the little boy and the frogs."

"Oh, no, they would enjoy it, too. They would like to hover about me."

"*Mutter zum Bienenlein; 'Hütt dich vor Kerzenschein,'*" sang the Princess.

"What an ugly language!" Bianca exclaimed. "No wonder mamma won't speak it. And you are going to make me learn it and send me to that convent near Bregenz, instead of to dear old England again. Ugh!" And Bianca wrinkled her nose.

"My dear child," remonstrated her great-aunt, "you *must* be able to speak German, when I take you next year to visit all our relations. It will please them, and some of the old great-uncles speak only German."

"All right, *gross' Tante*," agreed Bianca meekly. "Repeat that song again and this time say it all! I will write down the German words, and I'll put it into nice English."

Half an hour later, the carriage was announced, and Bianca sprang to her feet. "Listen," she commanded. And then she read aloud from a sheet of paper, torn from the writing-block which she held in her hand:

"Mother cries: 'Little bee  
Flame-light will murder thee.'  
But the wise Mother's call  
Small bee heeds not at all:  
Circles about the light,  
Humming with all his might,  
Hears not the Mother's cry:  
'Flame-light will make thee die.'

"Flame flashes wicked red,  
Small bee drops charred and dead.  
Mother cries: 'Son, beware,  
Trust not a maiden fair!'"

"There!" cried Bianca, waving the paper.  
"That is nicer than the German, and I did it in a minute."

"I don't think it is any nicer," said the Princess.  
"You had better stick to singing. You are more of a warbler in song, my child. Your poetry is jerky."

"I see little words dancing about like gnats when I shut my eyes," answered Bianca, "and I catch them. I have also written some verses to send to dear Mr. Grafton, and a letter to him. I have worked hard this afternoon!"

## CHAPTER XVI

**A** FORTNIGHT later, Reginald Grafton sat at a window in his mother's house at Newport. He was reading the letter from Bianca. It was dated, "Villa Bardi, near Como, July 20th," and was as follows:

"DEAR MR. GRAFTON:

"You are fond of poetry, I know, but I do not think you will like mine. Mamma wishes, however, that I send you a translation I made of some verses by Saint Catherine of Siena. I could not do it in the *terza rima*, like the original — that would be too hard, and, also, it would not sound so well in English. Therefore I have made the lines to rhyme, and the words are quite literally translated: but the Italian is so much more beautiful. I love to repeat Saint Catherine's words, '*O Cristo amore*,' when I pray (for I always pray in Italian). But English I love to write in best, and I like better to see Mamma playing Shakespeare in English, although her Italian is so beautiful. The most sublime of all her rôles, to me, is '*Maria Stuarda*,' but it makes me cry too much, and my eyes get red and my nose swells. (It is too large already!) Well,

good-bye, dear Mr. Grafton. Think of me sometimes, and think sometimes, also, of Saint Catherine of Siena. I love her best of all the saints.

“Just shut your eyes and imagine how she, a little white Dominican nun, went to Avignon. (Picture to yourself the journey in those days!) And she brought the Pope back to Rome, with the power of her words and with God’s help! Was it not brave, and bolder and greater work than those emancipated suffragette ladies (who break windows and throw stones) could dream of doing? Meditate upon this, please, for about an hour, and try to see the difference between the past and the present! The old time was so beautiful, was it not? Mamma is reading to me some of the *Paradise* of Dante. I promise you, that is something to hear, when *she* does it! We sit a great deal in the garden. I wish you were here with us, and I am sure she does, too. Well, I must say good-bye again. Don’t forget your little \* friend,

BIANCA.

\* “Little means young. I wish I were not so tall!”

A sheet of thin paper fell from the inside of the letter. On it was written:

“Nearer to God, His will to serve,  
Spirit Divine, my spirit draw:  
Inflame my heart with love and awe:  
From sinful thoughts my soul preserve.



"Lord God, uplifted by Thy might  
My faltering courage waxes bold  
To front all ills that life may hold:  
Oh, Christ, my Love: Oh, Christ, my Light."  
— SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA.  
Translated by Bianca Goritzka.

Reginald leaned his head upon his hand and pressed the small piece of paper against his forehead, and he "meditated," as Bianca had ordered him to do. It seemed to comfort him, for his heart was heavy. In the next room, his mother lay dying of paralysis after a long illness. Reginald was so glad that he had come back in time, and he had been thinking a good deal lately over his past life, wondering if he should have been more with her. She had not seemed to need him. Her deafness kept him from reading or talking with her. She was a cold woman, rigid and upright, as much apart from social need or sympathy as though she had lived alone on a tower. She always emphasized the pronouns "I," "me" and "my" in speaking, and underlined them frequently when writing.

She read a good deal, especially history, preferring the history of England, more particularly of the Reformation, which she considered to be the greatest movement toward civilization which the world had ever experienced. Except a sister older than herself, who was now confined to a wheeled chair in her own house near Boston, and two old cousins with gray moustaches, who rode stout

horses every morning in the long "parking" and sat at the Somerset Club most of the day, Mrs. Grafton had no intimate friends left of her own generation. She received few visitors, and declined to use an ear-trumpet, which made all intercourse difficult. Reginald remembered all this, and how, whenever he was at home, there was always a little routine to be gone through every day, and nothing else. A cold kiss on his mother's brow in the morning; she always had breakfast served in the dining-room and came down to it. Then Reginald would run his eyes over the *Herald*, as he did with the *Transcript* in the evening, or at tea; and he would mark in pencil whatever he thought his mother might like to read. This and a game of piquet occasionally after dinner was all the service he could render her; and he more than half suspected that Mrs. Grafton liked solitaire better, and rather enjoyed hunting through the newspapers herself.

Reginald could hardly feel that his mother missed him. He had written regularly, speaking usually about things and not people. He had touched very lightly upon his acquaintance in Rome with "La Bardi" and the Princess Olga, and had refrained from further mention of it, because his mother had written in answer: "I can't imagine how a *real* Princess (which you say she is) could have any sort of personal intimacy with an actress; and that a niece of hers, even left-handed (as this lady ap-

pears to be!) should go on the stage (a divorced woman, too, as the newspapers say 'La Bardi' is), and still have kept for herself any social position whatever: appears to *me* a most scandalous example of foreign ways. It is really worse than the goings on in Newport of the vulgar upstart rich, who have invaded it since *I* first came here. Thank Heaven, *I* am above and outside of it all, and I trust, my dear son, that you will be careful what kind of society you go into abroad, after all your unfortunate experiences. A man of your wealth is always in danger from designing people, and we can't trust foreigners, even with fine titles; especially when they are bigoted Roman Catholics, which, from your letter, *I* should imagine these persons to be. Be on your guard, my dear Reginald, for Florence's sake as well as to please *me*."

How could Reginald write more fully after that about his new friends, or in any way let his mother know how he felt toward them, or make her see the truth? After all, now that his love was hopeless, he was rather glad that he had not tried to explain. His mother would die peacefully, without any new anxiety. In the past, she had suffered so much, and had borne with silent dignity the humiliation of Constance's elopement.

To have a bolting daughter-in-law was, for Mrs. Grafton, an unparalleled disgrace. If Reginald had "misbehaved" himself, she might have endured

it with more stoicism; but this was a stain upon poor little Florence, Mrs. Grafton's own granddaughter, whom she loved better than any other living creature. The stern old lady had grimly set before herself the task of wiping it out, by training the child unfalteringly and strictly in the way she should go, so that no taint of maternal heritage should soil her white innocence.

In the first place, the grandmother had decided that Florence should believe that her mother was dead. The little girl was but three years old when Constance went away, and she surely could remember nothing, even if she could have understood. When Florence was six years of age, her grandmother desired to fix this fact of her mother's decease once for all in the child's mind; so she said to the little girl on her sixth birthday with impressive emphasis: "Florence, dear, it is now three years since you lost your mother. You know; *she is dead.*"

Florence stood on tip-toe, reached up to her grandmother's shoulder and shouted into her deaf ear: "*I know better!*" Poor Mrs. Grafton gasped, as if a pistol had been pointed at her head. "What do you mean?" Florence shouted again:

"She is Mrs. Jimmy Blake *now!*" And then the child danced out of the room, slamming the door behind her. Mrs. Grafton at once spoke to Kate Jago, the nurse. But neither she nor any servant

(they all had been years in Mrs. Grafton's service) could account for the child's knowledge. The strangest circumstance connected with it was, that Florence had never imparted this information to any one in the house before. It was buried once more in oblivion. Nothing was said to the little girl, and she never alluded to the subject, seeming to have a sort of intuition that her grandmother considered it improper, like some other words, "not to be spoken."

Mrs. Grafton had entirely repudiated the Jimmy Blakes as a matter of course, and strained relations had, in consequence, been imperative between herself and Mrs. Wilkinson, Constance's mother, who was trying to treat the whole matter on the modern plan.

Mrs. Grafton herself explained this attitude easily.

"Edith Wilkinson is a radical Unitarian," she said, "and such a sublimely generous soul, that, as she has no creed at all (she is very proud of that), she can make allowances for *anything*. There is no crime and no blunder that Edith Wilkinson won't condone, preferring the blatant and complacent sinner. She says she dislikes 'publicans.' But what can be expected of a woman who never had any of her children baptized? The cloak of her charity covers every *sin* in the calendar, as well as the sinner. I am sorry to give up seeing Edith, but

what else is possible, so long as she brazens it out about Constance and that dreadful Jimmy Blake? She has them stay with her whenever they get run down by rioting and want money."

Death was coming silently and surely to Mrs. Grafton, and Reginald was very glad to be at home. He went into the room whenever he was permitted, and he knelt and kissed his mother's pale hand with the knotted blue veins, and looked long at the set white face, so like his own, with its aquiline nose, thin lips and resolute chin. Her eyes were always closed, and she did not speak. Little Florence came in sometimes, round-eyed and for once silent. When she kissed her grandmother, the pale hands with the raised blue veins quivered slightly, and that was all. There was nothing to be done, only to wait.

Two smart trained nurses in white dresses and becoming caps alternated night and day. They "did everything!"

What else was there to be done? Reginald wondered, as he read again Bianca's little verses. And then, with a sudden impulse, he lowered his head and said the Lord's Prayer.

The next day, Mrs. Grafton died.

## CHAPTER XVII

**I**T was during the last week in August that a letter came from Reginald Grafton with a deep black border.

It was addressed to Leonora, and after running her eyes over it, she folded the two sheets hurriedly and shuffled them back into the envelope, to the Princess's great disgust, who was seated in a corner of the salon, apparently busy with her embroidery, watching Leonora out of the tail of her keen eye.

"Bad news?" she asked, in a dry staccato.

"His mother died two weeks ago, and he would like to send his little girl to me!"

"*Um Gottes Willen!*" cried the Princess, who always relapsed unconsciously into German when excited. "What can you have to do with his child? And we are going in five months to America."

"He does not intend that she shall live with us, only that I may place her at the convent with Bianca."

"Oh!" exclaimed the Princess, completely mollified, letting her work fall and beaming with pleasure. "That is quite another story." And she added, "That child must be very pretty; American girls always are, and with a convent training, and

becoming a Catholic (which, of course, she will), she might make a very good marriage."

Leonora laughed gaily.

"Don't go too fast, dear aunt," she said, "the child is only twelve years old. Besides, you know, *carina*, that marriages ought to be arranged in Heaven, as conversions are."

With these words, Leonora with Reginald's letter in her hand left the room and ran quickly upstairs.

As she disappeared through the open door, the Princess raised her eyes and looked after her.

"This is the first time," she said sadly, to herself, "that the child has not given me a letter of hers to read. We even have always opened indiscriminately each other's letters, whenever we knew from whom they came.

"What can there be in that particular letter from Reginald Grafton that she keeps carefully secret from me!"

The Princess Olga was anxious and puzzled. For months, she had been praying and shedding tears of pity over what she had romantically called a "*grande passion*" for a noble young Englishman which had been buried in hopeless renunciation. And now, within a few weeks, under her aunt's very eyes, Leonora appeared to be encouraging the devotion of an attractive young American widower, and laying herself open to a suspicion of reciprocity.



The poor Princess was pained; what she called her *feelings* were wounded.

"Leonora," she repeated, "has never before kept anything secret from me, except the wretched failure of her marriage." That was a noble reticence, the Princess admitted; but this suppression — she did not like to say what she thought about it.

She wondered if inconstancy was an inevitable result of stage life and surroundings!

Leonora had seemed always aloof and apart from anything frivolous or common, as she was from the contamination of what was unclean. She had even lived outside of all the sordid financial details of theatrical life. Everything had been looked after by managers and attendants, and the Princess had seen to all business transactions herself, and, having great executive ability, she had enjoyed hugely that part of it.

The repertoire of old and sweet-scented plays selected by the Princess herself, had been so limited in number that scarcely any rehearsals were necessary, and "La Bardi's" life as an actress consisted only in driving to the theatre, playing her part, and going home again.

Leonora was a "*phenomène*," according to French opinion: a being altogether apart from ordinary humanity.

No! Princess Olga could not think that the root of this apparent fickleness was to be found in

Leonora's life as an artist. It might be, however, in her temperament and in her blood, in that strain of it which was what her aunt always called "*faux Polonais*."

"I did not think she would be fickle!" And the Princess concluded her meditation with a sigh once more, thinking of Mary Stuart. The poor lady's mind would have been relieved, could she have been upstairs at that moment and have looked over Leonora's shoulder, as she re-read her letter.

"My mother died ten days ago," wrote Reginald, "and I really am at my wit's end to know what to do with little Florence.

"While my mother lived, any intercourse between the child and her mother (who, as I told you, is Mrs. Jimmy Blake) could not be thought of by me.

"Constance did see the child once, two years after she went away. This happened when Florence was five years old. It was an accidental meeting at the house of a cousin of mine, who had taken the little girl for a drive, and stopped at a friend's house for tea.

"Who should be there but Mrs. Jimmy Blake; and what should she do but kiss Florence, and say with a laugh, 'I am your mother, my dear. I am Mrs. Jimmy Blake now!' My cousin, Cora Grafton, told me about it soon afterward, and said that my mother had better not be told about this meet-

ing, in which I heartily agreed with her. She and her friend decided not to speak of the occurrence to any one.

“Well, all these complicated affairs have set me thinking; and the day after my mother’s funeral, I talked things over with my cousin, Harry Wilkinson, who is also Constance’s cousin and my lawyer. Harry seemed to be very decidedly of the opinion that Constance ‘should have a chance’ to keep Florence with her, for a part of the year at any rate; especially since I am likely to travel about most of the time, as I have been doing.

“Harry said he thought it would be the best thing to do all round, and he intimated that so many ‘queer things’ (as he called them) were being done in the best society nowadays, in an ‘intelligent effort of the modern world for re-adjustment of human relationship, and reforming of antiquated institutions based on rejected creeds’ (I am using Harry’s own words; he likes to hold forth), that the Blakes are beginning to be ‘received’ whenever they come to see Edith Wilkinson.

“‘Remember, my dear Reggie,’ he concluded, ‘that Edith is a splendid woman, and Florence’s grandmother to boot. It seems to me to be hardly fair, now your mother is gone, to keep the child away from her.’

“The upshot of it, Signora, was, that I told Harry he might write to Mrs. Jimmy Blake, offer-

ing her five thousand dollars a year extra (she already has fifteen thousand a year settled upon her for life) for Florence's keep and education, if she would take charge of the child.

"An answer was given me to-day by Harry.

"Mrs. Blake refuses! She says, Florence is too young for her to take charge of now; but that if she grows up a beauty, 'which is possible (since both of her parents are good-looking),' the offer might be accepted (with an increase in the amount of the allowance) six years hence, when Florence will be of an age 'to have her fling in the world.'

"Mrs. Blake adds (in further explanation of her refusal) that Jimmy is not fond of children, and it would be an awful nuisance to have a child hanging about. 'We play bridge a great deal, and keep late hours, and always spend our summers quite foot-loose, motoring about and making visits. We really should not know what to do with a child.'

"I am told at the Club that the Blakes are leading a 'rather lurid life with purple spots,' which, apparently, means too much champagne and cards, and riotous living all round.

"Really, I am honestly glad that Mrs. Blake declines my proposal. But what shall I do with Florence? And I turn to you, Signora. Will you let me send her over with her Irish nurse, Kate Jago, and put her at school in the convent near Bregenz, with Bianca? Perhaps Kate could be

housed in or near there. It does not matter to her, dear soul, where she is, if only she may be near Florence. Let me explain Kate.

"When Florence was left alone, a delicate child three years old, her nurse, this Irish girl, was about twenty, dark-eyed and very pretty (as she is still). One can see a trace of the Spanish blood, from which she gets her name. Kate was engaged to be married, and the wedding day was fixed six weeks from that time. Her 'young man' was Irish, intelligent and of good education. He now owns a prosperous 'grocery store' in Somerville and has laid by enough money to purchase a neat little house next door, whenever the wedding shall take place.

"Well, Signora, Kate Jago is still engaged; the bridegroom still waits. And all this splendid sacrifice has been made for my child, whose mother deserted her, and whom I have left unnoticed for three years.

"Am I learning lessons from your church? 'Sure, Mr. Grafton,' says Kate, 'I'll not leave the child until she gets beyond me. I carried her before she could walk, and she is the same to me as if she was my own. Patrick says I am right, and that he will wait.'

"Signora, I can see within these simple people the same light which shines within you and the Princess Olga. Your *souls* are alike! Education, rank, social convention, make no difference what-

ever in the way you look at life and duty. You are all like soldiers serving together under one flag and one Captain. This is true socialism!

"Please, Signora, don't tell all this to the Princess. I fear her zeal! My new sensations are like a plant young and tender that has only sent one or two small shoots up from the hard and stony ground. Even kindness might kill it. I am still a very sensitive heathen, ashamed and shy as to speaking about anything sacred.

"To you only I am writing as I do, because you can understand. Your sympathy has warmed me into new life, like sunlight in the spring. The Princess's chastening rod (this also in confidence) sometimes leaves black and blue spots on tender places in my soul, which shrink from castigation —

"I think of you and dream of you, Signora. That, I hope, is not forbidden. By the time you come to America, I shall be strong enough, I trust, again to live in your presence; and perhaps to become the kind old friend, a sort of bachelor uncle, which you would have me be.

"Let me know, please, by cable, about Florence: one word, yes or no. Be frank and unhesitating if you would rather say no, for I feel as though I were asking a great favour, the greatest perhaps that I could ask at this moment, for I really love the child.

"She is pretty and truthful and winning, even

though she has got a stentorian voice. That, however, can be softened. And remember, you have my full permission to make her a Catholic if you please. All I know is, that she is safe with you, and in the convent with Bianca."

"How I wish I could give Aunt Olga this letter to read," murmured Leonora, as she laid it away in the drawer beside her jewels, in the back of which was a long blue envelope, which caught her eye whenever she opened it: the ransom of Bianca. She locked the desk, and went on thinking. "Aunt Olga could understand, and she would see how sinned against he has been, and how nobly and unselfishly he has behaved. But I promised him not to tell, and I must not, until he gives me leave." It seemed to Leonora that she was happier than she had ever been before in her whole life. Peace and tranquillity had come to dwell with her, their white wings folded and at rest. She dreamed no more of jungles in India, nor of deserts in Africa, where wild beasts howled. In fact she had almost forgotten the romantic young Englishman.

All her meditations were dreams of religious devotion.

The Church had never been so real and living a presence to her before, to guide her every thought, word and deed.

A cable was sent that day, longer than the one word: Yes.

"Most happy, soon as possible." Princess Olga (one of whose pet economies was a telegram) said it was most unnecessary to send five words when one was enough. She was, however, in a very good humour, and as anxious to see the child and be kind to her as were Leonora and Bianca. She still kept an eye upon the future matrimonial possibilities for an American heiress. The Princess Olga had a passion for matchmaking, and, like her own aunt in Vienna (who had never been able to arrange any match for her), her plans also seldom came to a consummation. One party or the other was usually recalcitrant; just as she herself had been long ago.

However, she still wove designs quite intricate and rose-colored for all the young people in the family, and had already in her own mind selected a number of "suitable" young men for Bianca; all practising Catholics and with no tendency to Viennese prodigalities.

She kept an eye on them, as they were nearly all distant relations of her own family; and if, upon coming to man's estate, any one of these youths exhibited symptoms of decided frivolity, she scratched his name out and searched for another.

Leonora declared that what she called the *black* list (of those banished from favour) was quite full, and that only two desirable "*partis*" remained: one of whom she felt sure would be a priest, and the



other was beginning to be suspected of a "*volage*" tendency.

So Leonora did not restrain her aunt's castle-building, and it became a subject of much amusement (the Princess always laughing with the others), when she insisted, now and then, upon adding to the list the name of some old bachelor or widower of fifty, because she said she could have "confidence" in him!

Bianca enjoyed discussing the merits of possible suitors perhaps more than either of the others; sometimes threatening to restore to favour some one of the condemned, especially a certain young Prince "Erni" Greifenstein, now in the Navy, whom she had once seen, and thought "very nice indeed"; but whom her aunt had scratched from the list soon afterward, because she said she had "heard something about him."

## CHAPTER XVIII

TOWARD the end of September, there came to Reginald a letter from Leonora, written at Bregenz.

"I have already told you," she said, "how glad we are that your little girl is coming, and now, in three days, she will be here with us.

"Bianca is looking forward with delight to seeing her, for she loves children younger than herself. They are to share one room with two white beds side by side, and two screens, hiding small washstands and tubs at each end of the room. It is a simple place, but very admirably arranged and just what I wish for Bianca, as she *must* learn German. What you say about '*making* Florence a Catholic' amuses me; our Church teaches that conversion is accomplished by the Grace of God's Holy Spirit. All we Catholics can do is to try, ourselves, to live up to our Faith and to make it clear to others how beautiful and how true and how wise are all the teachings of the Church, because the Lord Himself speaks through her. If your dear child learns to love God and to serve Him, the wish to come nearer to the Lord Christ may lead her into

the Catholic Church. But it is not for us to urge or influence her. 'The Kindly Light' alone can lead her, as it led Cardinal Newman. You may be sure, however, that she is *safe* with us. We long to see her. She must be so frank and amusing, and if she looks so much like you as you say, be sure that all three of us shall be very fond of her.

"My aunt was delighted with your letter and hopes that you will write another soon to her. You know, she never writes letters and hardly ever a postal-card. There never was such a bad correspondent, so she wants me to tell you this and to give you her affectionate regard. I shall not trouble you with a letter about religion again. I have had to do it this time, just to explain how we feel about *converting* people.

"You asked me once to send you a written description of what you call a 'vision.'

"You had heard me say that I can imagine things with such vividness that they seem to me to be reality. Perhaps this faculty is a second nature for me, who am an actress, and who must spend half my life in strange places, times and circumstances, and merge even my own personality into the lives and emotions of all kinds of different women.

"To-day, the third Sunday in September, commemorates the Seven Sorrows of Our Lady. During the Mass is recited:

*"Stabat Mater dolorosa  
Juxta crucem lacrimosa  
Dum pendebat Filius.  
Cujus animam gementem  
Contristatam et dolentem  
Pertransivit gladius."*

"This afternoon when I was alone in my room, I repeated these words, and closed my eyes. All about me I felt conscious of a 'luminous darkness,' which the eyes of my soul gradually grew able to penetrate. Above me in the foreground I beheld a mighty cross. The dead Lord hung upon it. Underneath stood three women: 'His Mother and the sister of His Mother, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.'

"Near to the Cross, there stood an altar with lighted candles, and a priest in black vestments was saying a Mass for the dead. High in the heavens above the altar shone a cloud of glory, surrounding the transfigured Christ. In the golden light above His head was hovering a white dove with outspread wings. And this radiant, risen Lord spoke these words: 'I am the Living Bread that came down from Heaven; whoso eats of this Bread shall never die.'

"Before the altar a vast number of mourners knelt weeping; and farther away still, I beheld another crowd from which there arose a wail of lamentation. These mourners also were on their knees, but I saw no altar, only a large cross, nor

could I be sure whether it were a crucifix or not, for a shadowy figure of Our Lord seemed to come and go upon it, like a fitful play of sunlight upon a sombre wall. Still farther away stretched a vast plain, where a wailing multitude knelt before a solid stone cross, and beyond them I beheld yet another multitude of mourners, where there was no cross at all, but still the people knelt, and seemed to be praying to God while they wept. In the remote distance arose the dome of a splendid Jewish temple struck by a shaft of light from the sky above, and beyond this in a vast wilderness was a strange commingling of shadowy throngs and mosques and minarets, shrines and colossal statues, tombs and pyramids; all fading away out of sight upon the extreme verge of the horizon. And everywhere the air was rent by the same wail of lamentation. It was the voice of every created thing that is able to feel love and to suffer grief.

“Upon the ground under foot was outspread a soft cloud that looked like dust, which did not scatter nor disperse itself, but remained quiescent, assuming the semblance of everything that is mortal: men, beasts, birds, fishes and reptiles. Among the humble and the lowly creatures, I remember a ghostly little dog with haggard eyes, crouching at the feet of its dead master. And while I still gazed, motionless, lost in wonder, I beheld myriads of winged spirits, like angels, descending upon the

whole earth. Then the wail of lamentation died gradually away into silence. And the Divine Voice spoke once more, saying: 'Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.' "

When Reginald Grafton had finished reading Leonora's letter, he sat for a long time still and thoughtful. What she had written suggested many things to his mind, and invited comparison with others. Certainly her world was unlike the modern world about him.

He knew full well that a modern Bostonian, Harry Wilkinson for instance, would sniff scornfully at Leonora's letter, and condemn it as theatrical, full of mediæval Italian emotion and Papist superstition, not to be taken seriously in the twentieth century. To Reginald, on the other hand, what Leonora had written seemed sane and sound, and brought peace to his soul. Her faith was as simple and easy to understand as a little child's.

In the search after religion, which he had begun in earnest, Reginald Grafton had gone back to the Old Testament, and was reading the *Psalms*, enjoying their grandeur and their poetic beauty as he never before had done, his knowledge of them having been limited to a few, well-known and often quoted, for which he had had a merely æsthetic appreciation. Beside the *Psalms*, he had been also reading slowly the *Book of Job* and the *Book of*

*Isaiah.* Some of the things he found in the latter convinced him that the ancient history of defection and denial repeats itself in the twentieth century, while Divine Truth remains the same, immutable and for all time, in spite of what Modernists and Pragmatists assert to the contrary.<sup>1</sup>

One verse from Isaiah sounded especially apt to describe the unbelieving world of to-day.

"Our wicked doings are with us, and we have known our iniquities, in sinning and lying against the Lord; and we have turned away, so that we went not after our God, but spoke calumny and transgression. We have conceived and uttered words of falsehood, and judgment is turned away backward, and justice hath stood far off: because Truth hath fallen down in the street, and equity could not come in, and Truth hath been forgotten."

Reginald Grafton was beginning to learn many things. He had now left Newport and was living in Boston; and on this same afternoon he strolled into Flynn's Catholic book-shop. At first he looked sheepish, but, as nobody knew him, he became courageous, glanced through a lot of books, big and little, and ended by buying a very small black-bound volume: *The Following of Christ*, by

<sup>1</sup> "The *true* is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as the right is *only* the expedient in the way of our behaving" (p. 222). "We have to live to-day by what truth we can get to-day, and be ready to-morrow to call it falsehood."

— *Pragmatism*, by Wm. James, (p. 223).

Thomas à Kempis. In this little book, Reginald placed Leonora's letter, and he began to read the Imitation, sometimes a whole chapter and sometimes only a verse or two, every night before he went to sleep.



## CHAPTER XIX

### I

**T**HE two ladies were driving back to Bregenz from the convent where they had left Bianca, Florence Grafton and Kate Jago.

"What a funny child!" exclaimed the Princess. "I never imagined anything like her. She looks like the good and beautiful little girl in the fairy-tale, with her golden curls and lovely frocks; but when she opens her mouth, it is not pearls that come out—but toads. What a voice, and what words!"

Leonora laughed:

"All that may be altered. She is young yet."

"I don't know," said the Princess doubtfully. "Early associations don't let go easily, and early surroundings stick."

"It is not exactly the same, I think," said Leonora. "Mr. Grafton speaks *English*, and of course so did his mother, and the nurse has a soft and pleasant voice. It is the boys with whom she played. You know, she told us she hated girls, and played ball and tennis only with some boys, the children of her father's cousin. 'Girls are no good

to play with,' she said, 'and college girls are fierce!' But she really seems anxious to learn, and pleased, poor child, to be here. She said she thought *foreign* girls would not be too 'cocky.' I can't explain what she means, except that she always played with boys, so that these queer words she has caught from them. You know what Reginald Grafton said about American slang being now the only language of American youth. She will get over it, now that she is transplanted, never fear."

"She uttered a curious exclamation when she was excited, telling of a football game. She said, 'Oh, Gawsh': what could that mean?"

"It is probably an American-Indian expression," said Leonora. "Don't you remember the queer sound of the Indian words in Cooper's stories, which I loved, and Bianca too, when we read them together?"

"I never cared for that sort of reading," said the Princess yawning, and added: "I daresay the little girl will come all right. She could not be better placed for it."

"Bianca loves her already," Leonora declared. "She thinks her queerness is fascinating. Bianca will do the child no end of good, and she can do no harm to Bianca. She is a clean little thing, inside and out. One can see that at a glance. Her grandmother kept her carefully in the country, and she has not a taint of that horrible precocity which

is rampant just now in the new world. Her blue eyes are as clear as daylight."

"I like that Irish girl, too," said the Princess Olga. "She is simple, and straight and good. What tact a woman must have also in her position, in order to serve both God and her mistress. That female Cæsar, Mrs. Grafton, was, I imagine, a good deal of a despot, not as easy-going a person as Florence's mother; the lady so unlike Cæsar's wife: of whose existence," added the Princess emphatically, "I was kept, until now, in complete ignorance."

The day was bright, and the lake flashed like a silver mirror. Leonora twitched the sleeve upon which her hand was resting. She had been looking plaintively at her aunt.

"Olgazia," pleaded Leonora, calling her by the name she had chosen for her, when a little girl, "you don't mind that I did not tell you before about Reginald Grafton's wife. I had promised not to, and it did not occur to me that the Irish girl would speak to you about Florence's mother. You are not angry, dear?"

The Princess half turned away, and her lip quivered.

"You used not to have any secrets at all from me."

"But this was not my secret," responded Leonora.

The Princess turned upon her.

"I don't think you need split hairs about it *now!*" she snapped. Leonora opened her eyes wide.

"What *do* you mean?" she asked.

"We may as well be frank and open, once for all," said the Princess, "for even a drop of gall and bitterness that is shut up corrodes the heart; and a slight misunderstanding grows into a barrier of silence. I daresay you have noticed lately that I have been worried and anxious. Perhaps I have coddled my grievances and magnified them to myself in private."

"Say something definite, dear," pleaded Leonora between tears and laughter. "Your figures of speech tumble over one another."

"It is no laughing matter, Leonora."

"Only a light thing to be explained away could ever come between us, dear Aunt Olga." Leonora's wonderful eyes were very wistful.

"I will make a clean breast of it then," began the Princess, heaving a sigh of relief. "Nobody, I am sure, hates not to speak out more than I do. I sha'n't mince matters once I begin. I need not go over the details of what happened in Rome. We threshed that out in Munich, when I told you that I had sent Lord Arthur to Africa."

Leonora tried to laugh.

"You did that entirely off your own bat, dear

Aunt Olga, and you can't complain that he was not off like a shot — to use picturesque English."

Leonora had not quite accepted the situation after that explanation in Munich. The young man dropping everything and departing without a word to her, was not to her liking. She was too much used to being in the centre of the stage to willingly abide out of hearing in the wings. Leonora Bardi, although a "Diva," was quite human.

"'Off like a shot'? Of course he was. What gentleman would not be, after what I told him!"

"That is the dreadful part of it. Oh, can't you see it? The more I have thought over the situation, the more humiliating and unbearable it all seems! Just think of it, Aunt Olga. He did not say good-bye to me, *not* because he could not trust himself, but in order to spare me, after what you had told him."

"Was it not true?"

Leonora thought a moment. "In part, perhaps," she assented, and then pursued, "Come, I too will be frank and open. During all the last twelve years and more, my heart has been numb, like a dumb thing that has received a stunning blow. It has cowered in a corner of my life, shedding tears silently now and then, over blighted hopes and all the dead flowers of youth. I worked hard, and I lived for you and Bianca, never thinking of myself. I never even had time for that.

"I don't know what came over me in Rome at Christmas time, but something stirred within my heart, like a moth in a chrysalis, beating soft wings and demanding recognition.

"My years of hard work lay behind me. I had nothing new to practise, nothing more to learn. Like a violin virtuoso repeating everywhere his masterpieces, for whom his art is only a joy, who can keep himself high above the common things of earth, tranquil upon the heights where peace and rest abide. I had reached the goal of my artistic ambition. I had made the fortune which I set out to make for Bianca, and I believed that my life was complete, when suddenly came this disturbing emotion. One day, it found expression in words, and I seemed to hear a voice saying: 'Thou art young and fair, and in the midst of life and of passion, thought out and portrayed for this great monster of many heads, the public, to go mad about, thou thyself hast never lived nor loved.'

"That same night, in all the great crowd, at the theatre, I saw but one face, and I played to it. I had noticed it before, at the performances of the previous week, in the front row and always in the same seat. How the eyes adored me! The man was young, and a gentleman, but all this did not impress me at all at the time. I thought only of his face, noble and ardent and beautiful: I made

him laugh, and at the end, I made him cry! Oh, yes, I saw it myself (as he sat in the front row), although he tried to hide it by blowing his nose, and looking almost defiantly about him at the frankly weeping multitude. No detail escaped me.

"Some days later, at the Saltieris, I met this young Englishman; and instead of disillusion, I found realization. He seemed to me, even at first sight, to be my ideal of all that a man should be."

"I saw you both," said the Princess Olga, shaking her head; "and a finer couple I never beheld: That is what worried me so much later on, for I could see only trouble ahead for you both, my dear child."

The automobile was coming near to Bregenz.

"There is not much more to tell," said Leonora, hastening on. "One day, we walked together on the Pincio, the only time Lord Arthur told me that he loved me and that he was not ashamed to say so, because there could be no hope, only he could not keep silence. I said that, of course, with me, there was no question of love, because there could be none of marriage, even if I cared enough for any one. He broke out, then, that he had never dreamed for an instant that I could care. No child, he said, really expected the moon to come down from Heaven, even when he cried for it. 'My love is,' he quoted, 'the desire of the moth for the star!'"

The motor-car drew up at the hotel, and Fritz sprang out and opened the door.

"Then he went away," murmured Leonora, as they got out, "and, as you know, that is the end!"

They went upstairs, and the Princess followed Leonora into her room.

"Let us finish this subject," she said. Leonora threw up her hands:

"What more is there to say, my dear Aunt?" she exclaimed, between tears and laughter. "You seem to have spoiled his exit. Instead of running away from himself (which was altogether noble and praiseworthy), he, thanks to you, has been running away from me, which gives *me* a rôle absolutely what you call *lächerlich*. As I said before, it is humiliating."

The poor Princess looked very rueful, like a child that has unintentionally broken something precious. She had never looked at the subject from that point of view before. She had only hit out from the shoulder. She wanted the young man to go, and she had given him what she considered to be the most convincing reason for departure.

"I only told him the truth," she protested, a little doggedly; and then walked straight over to where Leonora was standing, near the toilet-table, smoothing her hair.

"Did not I?" she insisted. This was a question



"at the point of the bayonet," to use one of the Princess's favourite expressions.

Leonora turned about, and looked her aunt straight in the eyes.

"It *was* true. I am not so sure that it *is*," she replied.

"I knew it, I knew it, I knew it!" The Princess was triumphant. She almost danced as she uttered these words, but before she could proceed to any further speech, Leonora interrupted:

"You are entirely mistaken," she cried, excitedly. "It is not what you think at all. It is *not* Reginald Grafton! How can you think such unworthy things of me? Do you really believe that, after all my steady years of vegetation, of absence of all emotions except those of other people, that I am going to become at this late day a romantically frivolous shuttle-cock to be bandied from one young man to the other? Such an explanation would be worse than anything else you could possibly conceive of! If I *must* tell you all (and I will now), Reginald Grafton asked me to be his wife the day before he left Munich, and my refusal is the real reason why he went away. He thought I was divorced. He thought I was 'free,' to use the favourite Protestant expression. I explained to him all about myself, and what Catholics must do, how we must obey authority whether we like it or no, whether

duty be easy or hard. So finally he told me about himself — about his wife and his little girl."

"But why," asked the Princess, "had he said nothing about it to both of us before? Wait a moment" — she interrupted herself, "I *now* remember that, the night before he left, he seemed to be trying to tell me something just as you came into the room, after putting Bianca to bed. We had been discussing marriage, and he was talking modern unreason about it; claiming the right of two people to separate and leave inconvenient children to their grandmothers; when he suddenly injected into the discussion a remark which seemed utterly irrelevant to me about his mother being deaf, and I began to think he must have lost his own wits in the slough of Eugenic optimism. Now I understand. He was, without doubt, leading gracefully up to a confession as to his own experiences."

"Which he dared not make after our explanation the next day, for fear of shocking you just at the last, when he was going away."

"Then you do *not* love Reginald Grafton?" persisted the Princess, returning obstinately to her "mutton."

"He is the best friend I have ever had, and there is not a vestige of romance or sentimentality in my feeling for him," answered Leonora firmly.

"Thank God!" exclaimed the Princess im-

mensely relieved. "But, in that case, what has made you cool off about the other one? and what has become of the '*Sturm und Drang*' and the earthly paradise?"

The Princess put this question somewhat cynically, as a spinster of ripe years.

"I have begun to believe," declared Leonora, "that in Rome I yielded to the impulse of a moment, like a school-girl when she is let loose suddenly from a convent into the world. My pent-up feelings were as new and fresh as at sixteen. Also the time had come when the old scars had ceased to throb, and the burnt child no longer dreaded the fire. My heart was set free, like a moth from a chrysalis, and it fluttered about dazzled and bewildered, mistaking, perhaps, fireflies for stars!"

The Princess compressed her lips, and asked, drily, trying not to smile:

"Then you have really ceased to suffer from nightmares. You do not dream of jungles and wild beasts?"

Leonora blushed:

"I am ashamed to confess," she said, "that I do *not*: almost as ashamed as to remember that Lord Arthur thinks I do!"

"Perhaps," insinuated the Princess, slyly, "he may have begun to feel as you do. As for my poor self, I have, it appears, wasted much sympathy, and some tears, upon the two of you!" Then she

threw her arms about Leonora and kissed her on both cheeks with a resounding smack.

"My darling child," she cried, "what a load is off my mind! I was so troubled and bewildered, especially when that last letter came from Reginald Grafton, and you would not let me see it."

"You shall read it now, dear, and welcome; only we must wait until we get to Como, as it is locked up in my writing-desk."

At this moment, there came a discreet tap on the door, and Fritz announced a visitor downstairs.

"An old man is there, Excellenz and Durchlaucht, who says he is called Johann Swoboda."

Fritz had been wondering over that last name as he came upstairs.

## II

A room on the ground-floor of the hotel had been reserved as a salon for the two distinguished guests. It was in winter the sitting-room of the Herr Wirth and his wife. An enlarged photograph of the former hung above the mantelpiece, and bound copies of the *Fliegende Blätter* lay upon a marble-topped table in the centre of the room. Two large arm-chairs and a monumental sofa, covered with red plush, with a few light wooden chairs, completed the furniture.

The hotel at Bregenz is *einfach*, and there is a flavour of beer pervading the air of the bare-floored

corridors. But, if old Johann Swoboda had been wafted to the gate of paradise and was awaiting an angel guide to lead him in, there could not have been a more beatific expression upon the old man's face.

He stood at the open door of the salon as Leonora came towards him, and with a dry sob in his throat, he knelt and kissed her hand.

"*Ach Gott, meine Herrin!*" was all he could say. Leonora led him into the salon, saying:

"Close the door, please." She seated herself in one armchair and motioned him to take the other. This he did, bowing as though to apologise for the liberty he was taking to be seated in her presence. He held his green Tyrolese hat in his hand, and turned it round and round.

"Ach Gott!" he kept repeating, while his round blue eyes swam in tears. "How beautiful, just the same as ever — and how happy!"

"Yes, dear friend, very well and very happy," answered Leonora, and then she led the old for-ester, gently but firmly, to speak of the reason of his coming, and to explain the warning he had sent to her through Reginald Grafton.

Johann Swoboda's face grew troubled.

"First of all, Frau Gräfin," he said, "I must speak about one of my children, the youngest son. Does the gracious lady remember the little monkey who climbed trees and swung from the top branches,

leaping from one to another, when he was scarcely five years old, and walking on his hands with his heels in the air? ”

Leonora laughed gaily.

“ Indeed, I do remember little Nepomuc,” she said. “ He was an elfish little child, but very pretty. He is not dead? ” she added anxiously.

The old man drew together his bushy grey eyebrows.

“ No,” he said, “ Nepomuc is not dead, and God grant that the day may not come when I might wish that he were. The dead are safe in God’s hands, but the living, the dev—” he broke the sentence and pursued: “ Nepomuc is known as the ‘ Schlange-Mann ’ with us, and the ‘ Human Snake ’ in England, Frau Gräfin, and he does many extraordinary acts in a circus. He is quite renowned everywhere. At least, I have heard all this, but I have never seen him do his tricks. I could not bear it. When I let him go, I thought he should be a rider like my wife’s brother-in-law who took him to Vienna. There is strength and grace and dignity in riding; but these contorting and twisting tricks, these are a humiliation for me (his father), although his mother and brothers do not think as I do, and they go to see him when the circus comes to Innsbruck or even to Bozen, and they make him do these tricks to amuse them when he comes home

for a holiday, but I (his father) will not look at it. He dare not twist himself about and be a *Schlange-Mann* before me!"

The old man shook his head in great disgust. He would like to have spat upon the floor.

"Pfui!" he said.

Leonora strove to cheer him.

"Johann Swoboda," said she, in mock reproof, "remember that I am an actress!"

"For God's sake!" cried Johann, dropping his hat, and showing a crimson face as he picked it up.

"The gracious lady is a great artist, world-renowned; not to be named in the same breath as a circus-clown, even if she were not also noble."

"But tell me," said Leonora, "has your son anything to do with the warning you sent to me?"

"Everything, my lady," Johann leant forward and spoke in a low voice, hoarse with emotion.

"Nepomuc is the sworn slave of the Erlaucht," he whispered. "He worships the very ground under the Herr Graf's feet."

Johann Swoboda then went on to tell Leonora that on the night of Reginald's coming to Greifenstein with Goritzki, Nepomuc was there, having arrived from Munich that afternoon.

It was Leonora's turn to be startled, and to cry "*Um Gottes Willen!*" "Was Mr. Grafton at Greifenstein?" she asked, lost in amazement.

Johann recounted the history of that evening,

not omitting the bank-notes, nor the amount of them. Leonora covered her face for a moment with her white hands. "I understand now," she whispered. Then she raised her head, the hazel iris of her eyes only a narrow edge about the blackness of the expanding pupils.

"But, Johann, what has this to do with your warning?" she asked.

"Directly, nothing," answered Swoboda. He then told Leonora that he had overheard a conversation between his twin sons, in which one of them told the other that the Herr Graf had sent for Nepomuc, and wished to speak to him that night, at one o'clock, in his dressing-room.

"At one o'clock, my lady, I was behind a tapestry in the Herr Graf's bedroom where there is a small door, hidden and never used, but of which I have the key. It opens into an empty room, which has a window that looks on the Italian colonnade.

"From where I was hidden, I could hear every word, for they did not lower their voices, never dreaming that any one could be within earshot. Never should I have done this thing but for your sake, for I suspected there might be some plot hatching. Nepomuc is cunning, and the Erlaucht—I will not say more. He is my master. There is but one thing I would do against him; defend my gracious mistress."



"Go on, please," urged Leonora.

"They were together and had been some time talking," said the old man, "when I slipped into my hiding-place, for I had to go by way of the colonnade into the empty room, and the young American gentleman had lingered outside on his way to his bedroom which opened also on the colonnade. The result was that I did not hear the first part of the conversation. When I began to listen, the Herr Graf was saying:

" 'I rely upon you then'; and Nepomuc replied: 'Erlaucht, never fear. If the thing is possible at all, I can succeed.'

" 'And you will bring it safe to me at once?'

" 'The same day, if I succeed in getting it by daylight, and the next morning, if the trick comes off at night.'

" 'She will be in Munich all this week and next,' said the Herr Graf. That was all I could hear. They stopped talking, and I slipped away at once, quickly, going down the front hall stairway, and as fast as I could through the courtyard to the foot of the Graf's private staircase.

"I meant to do I know not what. I had a moment's impulse to seize upon Nepomuc and to shake the truth out of him. On second thought, I knew that would be most unwise. He would never, I think, betray me to the Herr Graf, but he would be able to outwit me. It is perhaps just as well that

Nepomuc did not descend the stairs at all. The elfish fellow slid out of the turret window and down the ivy-tree, just to amuse his fool of a brother who waited below to let him out through the great hall and by the front door; so he would have escaped me, at any rate.

"Next morning, the Herr Graf sent me to Innsbruck to the bank, and it is then that I got the idea to tell the young American gentleman, and to the train I went and told him. Nepomuc went also to Munich by that train."

Leonora tried to remember what had happened in Munich.

"I did lose my bag," she said, "in which I carry my keys. The waiter of the hotel, Fritz, brought it back to me; and he told a strange story which I don't remember distinctly, of a man climbing out of a window, and of another. They seemed to be fighting for the bag, and it fell. At any rate, I have got it back."

"And the keys?"

"Oh, the keys were in it all right."

"But, my lady, can you think what it is that was to be stolen from you? Surely Nepomuc would not take jewels, even if the Erlaucht could wish it."

"I think I know," answered Leonora, "and they have not got it."

Johann Swoboda then told her of the other conversation, and how Nepomuc had caught him lis-

tening. Leonora could not help laughing, but Johann was still furious at the filial impiety.

"However," he concluded, "the Herr Graf did not seem to suspect me, at the time, of being there to overhear him, although he has watched me closely since, and I could not therefore go to see you sooner. He left for Venice yesterday."

Johann repeated the words of Goritzki which he had heard distinctly, and had written down.

"I have decided to do nothing until she shall come back next spring with a golden harvest from America."

"I cannot thank you enough, dear old friend," said Leonora. "I think I know now what is threatening — and forewarned is forearmed. I have a long interval in which to be prepared, until next spring."

The Princess Olga came in at this moment and greeted Johann cordially. The two ladies insisted upon having coffee and cake brought in for all three of them together. Johann Swoboda took his leave half an hour later, declaring that the day was a heavenly one for him, and that his wife, when he should tell her, would be enchanted over the kindness of the noble ladies.

"He is a dear, good old man," said Leonora, as she waved to him a good-bye.

"And there are not many of them, young or

old," concluded the Princess Olga, whom men delighted not with a few exceptions.

"How gruesome it is," said Leonora, with a shiver, "to think that little Nepomuc Swoboda, the little tiny pink boy with blue eyes and golden hair, should be called 'The Human Snake.'"

## CHAPTER XX

**G**ORITZKI, having flung away for the moment all worry and care, having postponed until spring putting the thumb-screws on Leonora, and having, moreover, got a very welcome letter from Galicia announcing good harvests and an increased "allowance" for the next six months, had turned his back early in October upon the gloomy solitude of Greifenstein, and set off with a light heart to pass the gay season, as was his custom, in Venice. Here he would resume the character of the Venetian Goritzki — poet, singer and dreamer — which was indeed quite a part of his nature. As has been said before, it was drink that crazed Goritzki. In Venice he never wanted to indulge in strong alcoholic potations. Only the light, scarcely fermented wines of Italy accorded with his Venetian tastes and surroundings, and the delicate Murano wine glasses were smaller than the huge beakers which had been turned into champagne goblets at Greifenstein.

It was a curious fact that Goritzki was abstemious from choice in Venice and from necessity at Monte Carlo, where he did not want to spoil his game by

obscuring his wits. Perhaps the result of his enforced abstinence was that when he went to Paris after Monte Carlo, he always plunged into excesses either to drown his sorrows or to enjoy his winnings, according to Fortune's smiles or frowns.

Goritzki, however, was very fastidious indeed, both in his artistic taste and in his sensuous pleasures (he never could be called sensual). In immorality he was a gourmet, not a gourmand. He got drunk only upon the finest brands of champagne, and the houris he admired were fit for a prophet's paradise. Old Prince Ernest Leuchtenberg said of Goritzki: "He has nothing of the swine in him; he is either a gentleman or a devil!" The devil was encroaching as time went on upon the gentleman, but Goritzki in Venice was certainly the latter more than in any other place, and during the past year, moreover, he had felt a very strong desire to appear at his best when inhabiting the Palazetto, for he had met in Venice at that time, and was going to meet again, an American woman who was, for Goritzki, an enormously attractive creature, not only by reason of her millions, but of her personality. His fastidious taste could scarcely find a fault in her appearance, except that it was a trifle too *chic* to appear unconscious, which is the complete success in woman, just as the very best perfume is none at all. This lady smelt distinctly of violets and orris-root. She was almost too "*bien*

*gantée, bien coiffée, et bien chaussée,*" and Goritzki sometimes wished when he kissed her white hand that it did not give forth a faint odour of crème Simon and that the delicate nails were just a trifle less brilliant, suggesting the recent polish of a skilful manicure. But after all, he told himself, these were mere details easily softened. The child-like innocence of the woman and the naïve pleasure she took in being so beautifully "gotten up," as her friend and "chaperon," Mrs. Haines, expressed it, really touched Goritzki, especially when he knew that much of this trouble was taken especially to please him.

Goritzki was, therefore, in a contented mood, inclined to be happy and to enjoy the *dolce far niente* life that he lived in Venice, particularly in the companionship of a very pretty woman with regard to whose future and fortune he was already concocting plans and mingling destinies, like an alchemist who hopes to turn everything into gold. Goritzki always called this lady "the Soap-King's widow," but nobody really knew or cared where her "pots of money" came from in that scintillating "smart set" which Mrs. Brinkmeyer frequented abroad — and she never went home. This kind of society loves wealth and admires beauty. Mrs. Brinkmeyer had both; her husband may or may not have been a parvenu Jew — she herself was not — so what did it matter? They opened their eager arms

to her, and she lavished her gold on their entertainment. Who cared where it all came from? As her friend, Mrs. Haines of California, used to say: "The money is there, and the husband is really dead and gone. It is all her very own, and she has no children. So what does it matter?" concluded Mrs. Haines like all the rest, and she never answered any questions as to the origin of the late Mr. Brinkmeyer's millions. The one unusual thing about it all (for the outside circumstances of the situation are familiar enough) was that little Mrs. Brinkmeyer was really a woman worthy to be called by the much abused name of "lady." That word fitted her exactly; "gentlewoman" is something rarer and quite different, savouring of lavender and old china, of *Cranford* and of Miss Austen; a being apart from the gay butterfly society which Mrs. Brinkmeyer loved more than anything else in this world or beyond it, and whose praise was sweeter to her than incense at a shrine.

Hilda Brinkmeyer (her name was Hilda, *née* what, nobody knew) looked as though she might have been of Swedish origin, but she never talked about it and nobody asked any questions. To look at her was satisfaction enough, whatever her parentage. She was small and so slender and perfectly formed, that she gave no impression of being under a medium height. Her hair was golden, and her eyes dark blue. Her skin was as fresh and pink



as a child's, for in spite of a life of gaiety, she took very good care of her health, making a "cure" every summer at Marienbad to avoid a slight tendency to "embonpoint."

She could not be more than thirty and looked much younger — and she knew how to dress, always just inside of the fashion, but never in an exaggerated or at all unbecoming manner. Her clothes and hats seemed to belong to her, and were not the borrowed plumage of a Paris *cocotte*, the type of Parisienne who is now setting the fashions for respectable American democracy, and for the "smart set" everywhere else, until the entire female world of fashion looks like "birds of a feather" — the "half" and the "upper world" being scarcely distinguishable at a first glance

Hilda was not at all in any way or shape an advanced or emancipated woman. An amusing anecdote was told of her first season at Marienbad. The gay Austrians who happened to be there flocked about her. They admired and misunderstood the "*schöne Amerikanerin*," and they all learned a lesson. The most ardent among her suitors, who considered himself irresistible and who considered all women to be — if young and pretty — quite on the moral level of a Vienna ballet-girl and therefore to be won, sent her a *billet-doux* hidden in a bouquet of flowers, the sound of which was not less uncertain than the smell of the flaming red roses.

This suitor received a rebuff which, figuratively speaking, completely knocked the wind out of him; and he left Marienbad a much wiser man and for the time being a sadder. Of course, this episode was talked and laughed about at Marienbad, for the youth had boasted of his intended conquest. In consequence of her good behaviour, the beautiful American woman, travelling alone with her maid, was at once taken up and kindly encouraged by the well-behaved Austrian *Kurgäste*, some of whom were of such high rank that Hilda Brinkmeyer, through discretion, was able to attain to that upper circle of society which was the goal of all her ambitious dreams. Valor and audacity had failed to achieve this greatness for her friend, Mrs. Haines, who had grinned and girded about for some years on the outside fringe of smart European social life, chattering scandal about its various members, and who (except for a helpless Royalty or two) had been presented to nobody who, as she expressed it, was "worth while."

It was at this time that Mrs. Haines took possession in a masterful manner of Hilda Brinkmeyer. She said Hilda needed a "chaperon," especially after the episode in Marienbad, and she undertook to fill the vacant place. Some persons asked: "*Quis custodiet custodem?*" for Mrs. Haines, although of ripe years and with a face best described as "raddled," possessed a very rolling eye and a

wonderfully suitable form (which she called her "figger") for the wearing of smart clothes. She might have been a living skeleton without any, but dressmakers could do anything they liked with it. "They all tell me," said Mrs. Haines, "that my figger looks like Sarah Bernhardt at her *best*, before she fell into flesh." (Mrs. Haines called the actress "Sayra Burnard.")

With such seductive charms, Mrs. Haines was saved from any dangerous entanglements from the fact that she really was over fifty, and that the kind of man she might have attracted, had she been younger and not sharp-tongued, was afraid of her and kept his distance.

Poor little Hilda Brinkmeyer was literally possessed by this energetic friend. She liked and admired Mrs. Haines' daring words and deeds, although she would have shrunk from imitating any of them. Goritzki called the situation being "hag-ridden," for Goritzki hated Mrs. Haines with an unholy hatred, not only that she offended his every sense—having hair of a furious cherry-colour which swore against nature, a voice which, he said, "spits slang like a ruffled cat," and a detestable pervasion of "Jockey-Club" perfume—but chiefly because that astute lady played a game of poker so keen and deadly, that Goritzki's gorge simply rose against it. One particular night, after springing from his chair in livid fury (leaving a pile of gold

at Mrs. Haines' right hand), he vowed never again to play in the same game with her. Mrs. Haines had watched him closely. She only winked one eye as he marched away. "He most generally wins," she said. "It is a good thing for him. The Count doesn't know how to lose gracefully!"

Mrs. Haines knew that Goritzki hated her, but she said she could "manage" him, and as a suitor for Hilda's hand, she preferred only one other to Goritzki. This was Lord Rivers, a stout and good-natured peer with an ample waistcoat, whom Goritzki always called, "the belted earl," at which witticism everybody had to laugh, for, as Hilda said quite seriously: "But, you know, he could not wear one."

Mrs. Haines' reason for preferring the Earl was given in these words: "My dear Hilda, if you marry Rivers, you'll walk ahead of a lot of women who are born way up. You'll have your husband's station — you would in England if you were a barmaid or a bally-girl. Whereas, if you marry Goritzki you will be nothing but an under dog, you won't be even *Hof-fague*, as they call it. Not that it matters much anyway. Vienna Court balls are stupid except for the jewels; most of the women that wear them have not any shape at all, and they don't get their clothes in Parrus either. I know about it, because I was presented in Vienna when a friend of mine was Ambassador. I was received

by the old Emperor, too, which does not often happen, and he made a very pleasant impression on *me*. He is a nice old man with sharp eyes and gray whiskers, and hardly any hair on his head. The nicest king, though, *I* ever did meet was King Edward. He was so sociable, poor man. After all, my dear, England is the best place for you to settle in."

Little Hilda sighed: "But, Theodora dear, Count Goritzki is so handsome and he sings like an angel; and Lord Rivers is very fat and has a shiny face!"

So matters stood on this lovely day in October when sea and sky were soft, like old gold, and Goritzki reclined with folded arms on a low seat in a sumptuous gondola, almost drifting toward Torcello, the gondoliers swept along so softly. Hilda Brinkmeyer sat in the stern amid a heap of soft cushions. They had left Theodora Haines at home at the Hotel Britannia, in the immense salon of the first floor apartment in the midst of mirrors, glass chandeliers and gilded furniture.

"How beautiful it all is!" exclaimed Hilda. There were tears of pleasure in her soft blue eyes.

"Yes," said Goritzki, sighing. "It is beautiful, and it is also sad, for the summer is dead and nature is beginning to mourn." He waved his hand at a passing boat laden with grapes and purple figs. "See how the purple of autumn supplants the bright

pinks and greens and yellows. Nature mourns. The corpse of the dead summer is about to be buried in the sea, in a beautiful casket made of Murano glass with gold flecks, and the little fishes and crabs and the sea-nymphs shall gather about it, looking through the glass walls at the white limbs and pale face and golden hair (the dead summer will look like you, Hilda), and the wailing of their lament shall float upwards in little bubbles on the surface and break into tiny echoes that shall hover above the water like the distant sound of church bells."

"What a beautiful idea!" exclaimed Hilda Brinkmeyer. "Did you make up that little story this moment?"

"I did," declared Goritzki, "I thought of it as I looked at the boat laden with figs and grapes." He preferred not to mention that he had in mind a story from one of the "Cochonneries" (to use Princess Olga's favourite expression) of Gabriele d'Annunzio.

"You are a poet," said the little American, looking with admiration at the pale face and curling hair of the gentleman at her feet. It was like a romance — like a story-book — this gliding along in a gondola on an opal sea, in Venice.

Goritzki heightened the romance. He was leaning over the side, just touching the water with the tips of his white fingers and watching the golden drops and ripples. "I am more than a poet in feel-

ing, if less in expression. I am a lover," he said, and suddenly looking up, he fixed his glittering black eyes full on her face. "Last year, you gave me permission to call you Hilda; this year I want something more."

Hilda was flurried, it was all so sudden. "What do you mean?"

Goritzki drew a long breath. "I want you to marry me," he said. "You must know that I love you; you must have known it even last year when you said I might call you Hilda; you must have seen it in the letters I have written to you in the winter and spring while you were in Egypt, although I restrained my words. Now I must speak, and you must give me an answer."

Hilda was frightened. She had not expected to be wooed so brusquely. Although Theodora Haines had talked over the different matrimonial possibilities with such a frank and free tongue, that the prospect of becoming Countess Goritzka had appeared before her eyes as a name preferable to Countess Rivers—because she so much preferred Goritzki to the "belted Earl"—she had no idea that the choice was so imminent.

"I really don't know what to say," she faltered.

"Then, say yes!" exclaimed Goritzki, "and name the happy day. Let the marriage take place soon and in your own free country."

"Why not in Italy?" The words escaped Hilda

before she was aware of it, and she blushed crimson. It was a tacit consent that she had given.

Goritzki's brow clouded. "There is too much red tape over here; I am not a free man in Italy."

"But you are divorced from 'La Bardi.' I heard that before ever I met you."

"Separated I am, as much as any one can be. A *judicial separation*, but divorced, no. There are no divorces in Italy as there are in your free country, and there will not be as long as the cursed Catholic Church can prevent it."

"But I thought Italy was anti-Catholic, and the Pope a prisoner."

"Temporally, yes. But in matters spiritual," and Goritzki's moustache went up in a withering sneer, "that old Pope has his finger in every pie and does more mischief throughout the whole world than he ever did when he was a sovereign."

"But, then, you can't be free to marry," protested Hilda, with a pucker in her forehead, "in any country."

"I did not suppose there would be any fuss made over uniting two people in America, provided they have 'a clean bill of health.' From what one reads in the newspapers, people seem to be doing anything they please — making up their own marriage ceremonies and arranging to have the alliance temporary or otherwise, according to the wish of the contracting parties. I have gathered all this from



what I have read, and so I thought we might arrange an American marriage."

They had stepped out of the gondola and were walking through the grass out of sight of the gondoliers and with no spectators ahead of them. Goritzki came nearer and put his hand on her arm: "I thought you loved me," he whispered, "and when two people love one another, what does anything else matter?"

Hilda did love Goritzki as much as she could love any one. The short alliance with an old person named Brinkmeyer, who was always buried in what he called "the pizness," did not count at all. But over and above Goritzki, she loved Society: and anything illegal she knew would put her on debatable ground.

"Could I be called Countess Goritzka over here?" she asked.

He was obliged to admit that the alliance would not be quite "regular," but that the Italian government was expected, he said, at any moment to take the bit in its teeth and override the protest of a foe that was growing weaker in its control of a people bent upon freeing itself from all tyrannical restraints. "It can't take long," he said.

"Then we can wait until then," said Hilda, "for I know that even a Justice of the Peace would have to have some sort of papers to go by. Americans can go to the States out West and live six months

and get a divorce for anything at all. I know that, because I have friends who have done it; but I know, too, that they had trouble in other States afterwards, and they did not get quite back into society; and, besides, you must be an American citizen to have these privileges, and that takes some years' residence."

"And not to be thought of," observed Goritzki. "My title and estates are matters of too much importance; and," he added, looking hard at her, "if I had a son, he must have the rank of his father and inherit the title of 'Erlaucht.'"

Hilda blushed again. "I do not see that there is anything to do but wait." Goritzki's face had grown dark and bitter. Now it cleared like a stormy sky at sunset. He found her very winning. Her unhesitating acceptance of him as a divorced man had an American naïveté that pleased him, and she took it so much as a matter of course (like a child who does not know any better), that her ignorance had all the charm of innocence.

Near the wall of the old church and protected by its shadow, Goritzki drew near to Hilda and took her in his arms. "We are engaged?" he asked.

"Yes, dear," she answered, and kissed him, "but we won't say anything about it, and we'll wait and see what turns up." Goritzki tried to kiss her again, but Hilda said promptly, "No, not now," and turning about she walked swiftly back to the gondola.

in silence. "What would Theodora Haines say if she knew?" was in her mind.

On the way back, the gondola went faster, the two gondoliers sweeping the water with swift strokes. Venice glowed in the sunset, and Hilda clapped her hands and cried out: "It is like a city of enchantment. Tell me another story, one about Venice!"

"This time, it will be a true story," began Goritzki, "about the old Doge, Marino Faliero and his beautiful Dogaressa, Annunziata, who was scarcely more than a child when her uncle married her to the old man."

"Was he old and ugly?" asked Hilda.

"Very, and a common old creature, too, a fisherman. He was over seventy, and had a scraggy grey beard and rheumy eyes with red edges. The young men of the nobility giped and jeered at this union of crabbed age and youth, and one of the more mischievous placed upon the Doge's seat at one of the great Festivals a paper, on which was written a ribald verse about an old Doge and a young Dogaressa, 'Whom others may love while the Doge pays the piper.' Faliero threw the jester into prison, which much enraged the other nobles of Venice."

Hilda gazed over the water at the domes and towers that looked like ivory and old gold against

the faint violet of the horizon. "What happened, then?" she asked.

"Oh, there came much trouble and a tragedy. There was a youth who had known Annunziata in the mountains of Frioul. They had loved as little children and been parted. Neither knew what had become of the other until Antonio, on the day of the Doge's espousal of the Adriatic, had beheld the beautiful Dogaressa seated by Faliero's side, and recognised Annunziata."

"What did he do, then?"

"He went at once to the landing-place to try to speak to her when she should return. The old Faliero was reclining beside his lovely bride on the way back to the Palace, and he looked upon Annunziata's youth and beauty with a senile rapture. 'Behold,' he said, 'I have now two wives, and the old Adriatic will be furiously jealous of her young and beautiful rival.' Annunziata bent her head and shed tears furtively, for she had recognised Antonio. When she entered the Palace, she caught one glimpse of his glowing face and adoring eyes as he stood near to the great doorway, but she only bent her head lower and passed in. Some nights later, Antonio, who was always haunting the Palace at night like a vexed spirit, beheld a crowd of shadowy forms in the darkness hastening toward the entrance. As they came

nearer, he saw that they were armed men. One of them seized him by the arm and flashed in his face a lantern. 'Who are you?' he asked, in a threatening voice. Antonio answered that he was the son of a merchant killed years ago in a revolt against the nobles. 'Then thou art ours. Come with us,' said the dark man, who was an old merchant, a friend of Antonio's father."

"Were they going to kill the old Doge?" asked Hilda.

"Not they. Faliero had consented to help them against the nobles, and there was to be a bloody affray on that peaceful night in Venice. The nobles, however, got the better of their enemy. They seized upon the Doge himself, and Faliero was beheaded at the Giant staircase in the courtyard. It was a night of carnage."

"I remember," shuddered Hilda. "The place was pointed out to us. And what became of Annunziata?"

"Antonio and the old merchant rescued Annunziata. They bore her away down a secret staircase to a door under the Bridge of Sighs, where a gondola awaited them."

"And they were married, and lived happily forever afterwards, like the Princes and Princesses in Grimm's stories?"

Goritzki shook his head. "That is not the end-

ing," he sighed. "I told you this is a tragedy, not a fairy-tale."

"But this is a true story?" asked Hilda.

"Let me finish it," answered Goritzki, evasively. "There is not much more to tell. At dawn of day, as the pink and golden clouds in the east began to tint the water, a gondola could be seen gliding forth from Venice upon its way to the mainland. Annunziata lay in the stern, the old merchant and Antonio were rowing. Suddenly out of the north there arose a huge purple cloud advancing more swiftly than a race-horse, and beneath it the crinkled water turned green and bronze like a snake-skin. Great waves began to hump themselves in the distance and to tumble about like sea-monsters with tawny manes. Nearer and nearer came the whirlwind; lightning darted from the cloud and the thunder crashed. Antonio laid down his oar, and he took Annunziata in his arms. 'Fear nothing, my love,' he said. 'I am not afraid with thee,' replied Annunziata. Then the whirlwind passed over them, and the great purple cloud swung by and faded away in the distance. Up rose the sun and smiled upon the angry waves. The sea grew calm and stretched away like a beautiful piece of changeable China crêpe, Nile green and turquoise blue. But upon its limpid surface the black gondola was nowhere to be seen. That jealous old wife, the Adriatic, had in

fact arisen in her wrath and had destroyed her beautiful young rival."

"What a gruesome story!" cried Hilda. "And it is really true?"

"Some of it," answered Goritzki.

"You are a wonderful improvisatore," exclaimed Hilda.

As they approached the Hotel Britannia, Theodora Haines waved a handkerchief from the balcony.

"We shall keep our engagement a secret from her," Hilda said.

"By all means," assented Goritzki.

## CHAPTER XXI

THE pleasure with which the Princess Olga had received Leonora's confession of wholeheartedness was slightly mitigated, on reflection, by pity for the absent exile, whom she herself had sent off to Africa to live on a sentiment which could not be called "hope," but was still substantial enough to keep alive in his heart some fond fancies of a possible future. What the Princess had imparted could not be called encouragement, but it was an admission which would keep up courage and palliate despair. Mutual renunciation is far more enlivening than the abnegation of a happiness which one could not count upon possessing at all under any circumstances whatever. To share a sharp regret is surely better than to suffer a dull numbness all alone.

At least, that was the Princess Olga's view of the matter, and that her view had been shared by Lord Arthur was evident from the glowing eyes and cheeks of the dejected youth after she had pronounced the decree of banishment when she mercifully added, "It is for *her* sake also that I ask you to go away." Now the whole *mise-en-scène* was



changed : for Leonora (whom the Princess could not acquit of a certain fickleness of heart) had frankly confessed that she believed herself to have yielded in Rome to a momentary fascination, which had culminated in a quite human and feminine outburst of pity over her own enforced self-sacrifice — that she had, in short, been very “sorry for herself,” believing that a real and noble love had at last come to her — a hopeless *grande passion*. Leonora, a wonderful tragedian, was perhaps not averse to assume this rôle in real life, and the Princess Olga, herself full of romantic dreams of un-lived romance, had often knelt and wept over Leonora’s unhappiness and repeatedly had said to herself : “Oh, the pity of it!” Now this pity had been removed from Leonora, to be transferred and concentrated upon the poor deluded young Englishman, who was still cherishing a deceptive counterfeit, believing it to be a sacred treasure. The Princess would never admit that the knowledge of any truth (however unpleasant) could be folly, and so she made up her mind to awaken Lord Arthur from the bliss of ignorance, especially as she herself was responsible for the delusion ; and with this determination she had seated herself one morning at her writing-table before an open window in the Villa Bardi toward the end of October.

The Princess usually spent the winter in Vienna, where she had an apartment in the Wallnerstrasse,

and Leonora, when she was absent, was always accompanied on her professional tours by her father's sister, the Countess Grimani, a vivacious Italian widow; but this year, owing to the American engagement, the Princess was not going to Vienna at all. They were to stay until November at Lake Como, and then go to Florence until the middle of January, sailing from Genoa on the 20th.

The Princess was too busily occupied to glance at the soft blue sky and the flash of blue lake beyond the garden. She had already written a beginning which did not please her on two separate sheets, and torn them into very small pieces, which she dropped into the wastepaper-basket. It was not an easy letter to write, and she disliked all letter-writing. She was, however, a person of plain and direct ways, both by birth and breeding, never having been obliged to indulge in circumlocution about anything. On the third sheet of paper, she scratched forcibly and uninterruptedly (the ink was a dark blue-purple), and after half an hour she signed her name with a flourish, and sat back in the chair to read over the four pages of her letter.

The Princess Olga seemed quite satisfied with the result. She had, at any rate, clearly conveyed her meaning to the young Englishman. That the English vehicle should have a foreign accent did not bother her in the least. She liked her own ways of speech and resented correction.

"MY DEAR LORD ARTHUR:

"Since you went away I have often thought over our last conversation, and have feared sometimes that I may have misconstrued the feelings of Leonora. It is a subject hard to discuss, especially in this disgusting modern world, which is so *terre-à-terre* or, as I call it, so *ventre-à-terre* in all its views of life, that no emotion of love or even friendship may be put upon a high plane by those who keep clear of modern 'Cochonneries,' without that they shall be accused of either antiquated sentimentality or else of hypocrisy.

"You know, and I know, that love can exist which is hopeless in this world, and of which people should have no cause to be ashamed. Such was Dante's for Beatrice. I had no hesitation to tell you that I believed Leonora to share your love for her. I should not to-day regret having said this to you, if it were true as I believed it to be. Leonora had not told me herself, and I am now quite convinced that I have mistaken her feelings and been misled by appearances. Is it not right that I should tell you this?

"I hope you will not mind it too much. After all, one has to live down and over many things in this world. The only thing one must make sure of is happiness in the next life, not in this one. God tells us what to do, and we must do it even if it breaks our hearts. I wish that you were a

Catholic, dear Lord Arthur, and you could more easily submit to the inevitable. We decided, I think, that you would not give us news of yourself for a whole year; but the year is so soon past and we go in January to America, so perhaps you might begin now to let us hear from you sometimes, and to tell us when you shall be going back to England.

"Leonora does not know I am writing (I thought it best not to tell her), or else she would wish to be *kindly remembered*. I may tell you (if it would be any consolation) that you are not the only sufferer. There has, too, been a young American, *very* nice but not even a widower (divorced from a bolting wife) who adores Leonora. His name is Reginald Grafton. He has gone back to Boston. He, too, is really *very nice*. But dear Leonora is heart-whole. That I am sure of now, for she has told me so!

"Next spring, perhaps, we may see you in London when we return from America. Leonora is to play there in May and June.

"Good-bye, dear Lord Arthur, and believe me to be,

Always your friend,

"OLGA LEUCHTENBERG."

The Princess hated to write letters, but when she once made up her mind, she said a good deal. "I am glad I told him about Reginald Grafton," she assured herself, as she directed her letter to the For-

sign Office from which it would be forwarded. "I think it will do him good."

Had the Princess seen the face of the recipient after having read the letter more than three weeks later (in South Africa) she would perhaps have changed her mind. At all events, if it did "do him good," it was a bitter draught, and his expression betrayed the bitterness.

The Princess arose from her chair before the writing-table with the consciousness of a duty — and a pleasure — well performed, and walked through the doorway that opened on a wide balcony. She looked out into the garden in search of Leonora, who had gone out under the trees by the lake to read the letter written to the Princess Olga by Reginald Grafton. It was very long, not only by reason of what he wrote himself, but of the scraps of newspapers upon various subjects — religious and moral — which preoccupied the Princess and about which she had craved information. "How appalling!" that lady had exclaimed in disjointed outbursts, as she read the letter at the breakfast-table. "What a whirlpool to plunge into! Shall we escape alive?" Leonora had listened to this running fire of comments with some impatience and much curiosity. She put out her hands. "May I read it?" she asked. "Indeed, you *must!*" replied her aunt.

So Leonora walked away quietly under the shade

of the trees by the lake and read carefully the long letter that Reginald Grafton had written, after which she sat for some time in deep meditation. "He will be a Catholic, thank God!" she concluded. "There can be no other rest or peace for a soul that earnestly begins to seek. And the dear little girl, too! Bianca writes that she has already asked to join the class for instruction with the others. Florence says simply: '*Kate's* church must be the true church!'"

For three hours, Leonora sat dreaming under the shadow of the laurel trees. "Are you coming in to luncheon?" called the Princess Olga from the balcony at noon.

Leonora walked through the garden, where the roses and heliotropes still bloomed as though summer had not departed. She, too, looked anything but autumnal, slim and tall in a short frock of transparent white over pale-blue. She was carrying an open parasol, also blue and white, and wore no hat. Her hazel eyes were bright, and there was a pink tint on her cheeks from the fresh air, although her white skin showed no tan. "How beautiful she is and how young! God help her!" thought the Princess Olga, standing on the balcony, a white-haired and sturdy figure clad in a linen blouse and flannel skirt, for the Princess tramped about much and scorned a parasol; and she was not only tanned, but slightly freckled, and the skin upon her aquiline

nose was peeling since the last day spent in mountain-climbing.

Leonora was not allowed to take part in these excursions, which her aunt called "Hoch-tours," and upon which she was accompanied usually by some English friends, who came every year to Lake Como.

## CHAPTER XXII

**T**HE long letter from Reginald Grafton, which gave so much satisfaction to the Princess Olga, ran, in part, as follows:

“It is a pleasure to meet the saving but scanty remnant of ‘old-fashioned Bostonians’ once more: men who are clever, high-minded and clean-living. It is also depressing to observe that these men are all of ripe age, and that their young (when they have any) are ‘having their fling’ with the rest, and quite beyond any parental control. They try to be as unlike their forefathers as possible, and they succeed in the attempt. They import from abroad, *not* things and memories of beauty, as their elders did, but foreign vice and corruption, shorn of a certain picturesqueness, which in Europe prevents vice from being unsightly.

“I am considered, by many men of my own age or younger (who are ‘in the swim’) to be a ‘back number’ and ‘cold-blooded,’ because I object to women spending their time in drinking cocktails and gambling, and because I consider the ‘dernier cri’ Parisian costumes and dances of fash-



ionable society to be absolutely indecent. Helpless mothers (dear, good women) say to me: 'We can't do anything with our girls. They get away from us. Parents no longer have any authority over their children, such as *our* fathers and mothers had!'

"After three months spent in observing modern America, I am beginning to agree with you (remembering all that you have said to me) about the necessity for 'a fixed standard of behaviour' and for 'strict obedience to authority,' and I am wondering whether all the reckless madness I see about me may not really be caused by the modern American world's rejection of dogmatic and authoritative Christianity.

"How is it possible, otherwise, to transmit the same ideals and the same faith from one generation to another? I see the descendants of our greatest men becoming, in this third generation, 'rabid socialists.' Their theories are put into practice. They boast of having the courage of their convictions. Several marriages have taken place where the ceremony is 'composed' by the bride and groom and where a Justice of the Peace officiates because it is expressly stipulated that the name of God must not be mentioned. Suicide is becoming frequent, because among the younger 'readjusters' it is declared to be a noble and praiseworthy action to suppress oneself if not entirely sat-

isfied with circumstances; and among the elder unbelievers, suicide is sought as an escape from sickness or pain. Can a social community like this, which is shaping itself in Cambridge and Boston, be considered quite sane? If the dead could speak the grandfathers of its component parts would be unanimous upon this subject, and there could be no doubt about their authority and capacity to condemn these mad pranks. Some of them were men whose work has won immortal fame. And yet — all this sets no example to their emancipated, 'free thinking' descendants. Some of the instances of juvenile independence are amusing. I repeat one of them as an example. The son of a distinguished Harvard professor escorted a young girl to a play last winter which happened unexpectedly to be very improper. He said to the girl:

"‘I am so glad we did not bring *Mother!*’ and she quite agreed with him. Of course it is funny, *very* funny; but it is something else, too! Unbridled Young America is a real danger to itself and to our whole Country!

"When one remembers New England's past — where family life was sweet and simple and old-fashioned — in its religion and in its morality; when one recalls the poets and philosophers whose ideals were all 'supernatural,' one can see, Princess, the truth of what you once told me when we talked about these Americans of a past generation:

‘They all belonged to the “Church Invisible.”’ I think of Longfellow, whose poetry you love and of whom you said: ‘He was one of the pure in heart who see God in all that is beautiful’; I think of Emerson, whom I dimly remember as a serene old man, waiting for death as the portal to a higher life, who in a personal atmosphere of transcendental simplicity had followed always his own precept: ‘Hitch your wagon to a star!’ And then I look about me, and behold a young and reckless horde of modernist vandals, shrieking for ‘social readjustment,’ all of whom have imitated Viviani, in France, by extinguishing ‘all the celestial lights.’ With discordant, shrieking, and cracking of whips they jolt and jostle along; their wretched little wagons always getting deeper in the mud, and going farther into darkness, toward Chaos! As to the great Church, Catholic and Apostolic, it is regarded here as being simply the Irish democracy of Boston, that political *bête noire* of all my old Republican friends.

“I have been much interested by ‘an open letter to J. G. Wells’ written by Hilaire Belloc, which I read a few days ago. I remember, Princess, that the writings of Wells come under your classification: ‘Cochonneries,’ and that you collect and admire the works of Belloc — as one of the cleverest of the English Catholic writers. So I shall quote some of the most striking sentences from Belloc’s

letter — and send you later a copy of the whole. He says to Wells:

“ ‘You know how, at high tide, a harbor will look like a big lake, full of every sort of diversity and conflicting interest of wind and minor current, and ripple and patch of calm. You know how, as the sea begins to suck back its own, the currents grow stronger and more defined, but there is still complexity and confusion; and you know how at last some great sandbank will heave itself above the falling waters, and they will run in two single, direct, silent, puissant bodies of water solid upon either side.

“ ‘Something like this has happened to the modern world. A generation or so ago it was that pleasing, complex, easy thing which older men still remember. At least, it was that upon the surface. Only those who knew the depths (Lacordaire was one) were sure by the conformation their surroundings showed them, that deep currents were in the nature of our society. The tide has fallen, and with every day it is more clearly apparent that conviction is dividing into two bodies of thought, violent, hating each other, utterly distinct. One of them is Catholicism, and the other is that which you see shaping around you.

“ ‘I say wisely “bodies” of thought. Not theories, but things, not conclusions but enthusiasms alive with passion.’

“These words of Hilaire Belloc have made a deep impression upon me, and as I gaze at the modern American ‘free-thinking’ and *thoughtless* world, I tremble for the future of our great country if this ‘social readjustment’ shall have its way; and I find myself agreeing with Hilaire Belloc—that there must come a great fight and that one must be distinctly on one side or on the other.

“I could write a long list of eccentric elopements and divorces, as well as casual alliances, to continue only according to the wishes of both parties. (They call each other ‘comrades,’ not husband and wife.) These vagaries would make one laugh, but that they are as gruesome *au fond* as a masquerade at a lunatic asylum which I once attended on ‘mardi gras’ by Dr. Janet’s invitation, at the Paris Salpêtrière. But I must now come to a subject no less gruesome, but of more personal interest to you and the Signora. I mean the theatres. I cannot possibly bring myself to enclose any newspaper account of the abomination of some of the new plays, against which every respectable American is protesting loudly and in some instances the police are acting. It is an outrage upon all decency, and it seems incredible that any person (however godless), with a shred of self-respect, could cross the threshold of a theatre that puts such infamous things upon the stage. I tremble for the Signora; she will

be like the lady in Comus in the midst of such foul revelry.

“Dear Princess Olga, you see how I have taken your advice and have been thinking, observing and studying very *hard* in these few months. You said to me once, ‘If intelligent people would only *think!*’ I shall not go to New York to meet you, and I shall try to keep away, except, perhaps, for one meeting in Boston. God forbid that I should allow the newspapers even to mention my name. They are sure to assail ‘La Bardi’ with volleys of social items and professional extravagances. You can hardly form an idea from experiences in Rome, Paris, Munich, Vienna and London of what an artist travelling in America must submit to, of impertinence and notoriety. It is the same for everybody prominent in public or social life. A pillory is cloistered seclusion compared to conspicuousness in the modern press.

“‘God bless you and her!’”

This was the letter which Leonora held in her hand, as she entered her aunt’s sitting-room. Her eyes looked quite black, the pupils dilated—the soft hazel iris extinguished. “I can’t do it!” she cried, sinking into a chair, “I simply can’t!”

“Can’t do what?” exclaimed the Princess, who was standing in the middle of the room, waiting to go quietly downstairs to luncheon.

"Go to America. I *won't* go!"

"But what do you mean? You are going. Everything is arranged."

"The contract is not signed, and I will not sign it."

"The manager comes to-morrow from Milan."

"I shall telegraph him not to come," cried Leonora, springing from the chair.

"Are you mad, child?"

"No, not mad, but I should be. This fear seized me as I came up the garden path. I felt perfectly calm when I read the letter under the trees and sat quietly there for three hours. Then suddenly, as I was coming in just now, out there (near the round rose-bed in the garden) a voice seemed to say to me: 'Don't go!' and I *won't* go!"

"For God's sake, child, do be sensible. Don't be an actress off the stage!" cried the poor Princess, distracted. "Come downstairs and have something to eat. You have looked ill and tired lately — more beautiful than ever, but not well — and all this week you have not eaten enough to keep a bird alive."

Leonora laughed hysterically, as she followed her aunt downstairs. "A bird," she said, "eats twice its weight every day, as I have been told." They ate in silence, Fritz being in attendance.

An hour later, upstairs again in the Princess's sit-

ting-room, matters came to a crisis. Leonora lying on a *chaise longue* with her thin arms raised and her eloquent hands twining together or beating upon the pillow behind her head to emphasise her speech, poured forth a stream of incoherent words. Her nerves had quite snapped after long years of tension. The Princess, like a square tower built to lean upon, sat straight and strong beside her, now and then patting the soft light hair and withdrawing her hands again as she listened patiently to the disconnected outpouring of Leonora's troubles.

"I always said, dear Olgazia, that I should leave the stage next Spring, after going to London. You surely remember. Don't you know it was determined that we should have a peaceful life with Bianca as soon as she is leaving school?"

"I know, dear," said the Princess, seeing that Leonora paused for an answer.

"Then why not now?" broke in Leonora. "I did say that I wanted more money for Bianca, but, Olgazia, there is enough already. There will be a sufficient marriage portion for Bianca, and as for me — what do I want? If only I can be rid of the stage millinery, we can live so quietly here at Lake Como. It costs us scarcely anything when you are my guest here, and when I am yours in Florence, then it costs *me* not a penny, and also when we are both at the Uncle Ernest's in Styria for our long



visit. It seems as if no two women *de notre monde* could live more simply than we do, or spend less money or love a quiet life better."

"That is all true," asserted the Princess, as Leonora paused again. "And how often have I told you also that all I have is yours and Bianca's?"

Leonora unclasped one hand from behind her head, and passed it lovingly over the Princess's white hair. "Darling, I know it, but there is no need. You have so many struggling people to help, and so many poor to lift up from misery." Leonora became more excited, and again her eyes grew black as they stared upward from the pillow. "This American trip — I can't stand it! It has become a nightmare. To think of the hideousness of making a rivalry with theatrical indecencies too horrid for him to speak of — and the reporters besieging us for 'personalities.' Only think of his having to dodge around corners for fear that our names should be put together in some scurrilous public gossip! Oh, my God!" and Leonora burst into hysterical sobs, covering her face with her hands. "It is too much! I could not bear to live through it — and for money!" Her head fell back upon the pillow.

"My darling Leonora," exclaimed the Princess quite overcome. "You sha'n't go!"

"And to think," Leonora whispered, as her sobs grew fainter, "that he might believe, as the other

one does, that he must also keep away for *my* sake!"

"He won't think it, never fear," said the Princess sturdily, "Reginald Grafton is no coxcomb."

"Neither is Lord Arthur."

"But I told him, it is my fault!" And the Princess almost confessed to the undeceiving letter, but restrained herself, being bent upon quieting Leonora's overtaxed nerves; any explanation about that matter could come later.

"That is true," murmured Leonora. "Reginald Grafton always thinks too little of himself — a most excellent and unusual thing in a man and especially in an American!" Leonora wiped her eyes and smiled upon the Princess. "I feel much better now, dear. Thank God that is settled. You can't think how I have been tormented for fear you would not let me."

"Leonora, dear," remonstrated the Princess, "I never opposed you in anything."

"It is time, dear. You have always spoiled me — you and the *Bon Dieu*."

Leonora lay still a moment and then said, "Olgazia, how must a woman feel who has nothing outside of herself to lean upon and to guide her? A man without God — he may keep straight enough by planting his feet upon the earth and by hewing and delving for himself a career. But a woman without God! A creature of love and emo-

tion! She is like thistledown — blown hither and thither by every breeze. I feel as the Englishman did who watched the man going to Tyburn to be hanged, when I see the great artists, dear women, who have been blown astray. I say, ‘But for the grace of God — there goes Leonora Bardi!’”

The Princess Olga bent forward as Leonora paused, worn out. “What has made you suffer so much during this last year, dear child?”

“God knows. He knows that had I been like the thistledown, I should have been blown here and there to my destruction. I have found out that I cannot be sure of myself, only of Christ, and of the Church — Oh, don’t you see?”

And the Princess Olga fancied that she did see. “My darling Leonora,” she said, kissing the white brow (she did not say “little Mary Stuart” this time, but she thought it), “I understand you. We will do just as you say — you shall have peace. There will be no more ‘*Sturm und Drang*.’ You and I will set sail for Egypt in January after Bianca has had her Christmas holiday in Florence. Will that please you?”

Up jumped Leonora, radiant and threw her arms about the Princess’s neck. “Darling Olgazia,” she cried in ecstasy, “that is just what I wished — Egypt and nobody but you!”

The news went round the world, “La Bardi has nervous prostration,” “La Bardi has cancelled the

American engagement," "La Bardi has announced that she is leaving the stage, never to return."

Reginald Grafton read it in Boston and said, "Thank God!" Goritzki read it at Monte Carlo, and he swore audibly! The "golden harvest" would never be gleaned. However, there would be enough to be gained from Leonora for his purpose; a good, round sum to tide him over until the divorce law should be passed in Italy.

Hilda Brinkmeyer and Theodora Haines were also at Monte Carlo for the winter. Fortune was smiling upon Goritzki in the *salles de jeu*, and he really was quite in love with the gentle little American lady who permitted the "secret engagement" (which she feared to divulge to Theodora) but allowed no familiarities, even by moonlight in the gardens—an old-fashioned kind of good behaviour which tickled Goritzki's jaded palate.

. . . . .

At Luxor in January the Princess Olga got a short letter from Reginald Grafton, telling her that on Christmas Eve he had been received into the Catholic Church. "Of course I can't talk about it," he wrote, "but you know without my telling you what a happiness it is. I had already come to a decision when Florence wrote to me in November, to thank me for saying she might belong to 'Kate's Church,' and that she would be received on Christmas Eve. Then I made up my mind that

voted down the Socialist divorce bill. God knows how long we shall have to wait now for freedom."

"I am sorry, Roman dear," said Hilda gently.

Goritzki sat down beside her and put his arm behind her shoulder along the back of the seat. He did not touch her but he came very near, his moustache almost grazing her pink cheek. "Hilda, my darling," he pleaded, "it all depends upon you — our happiness is in your hands."

Hilda trembled. She loved Goritzki, or thought she did, but she loved "society" more. "I could not do anything illegal, Roman," she averred.

"But Hilda dear, it would be all set right in the end; and meantime we should be so happy in Venice at the Palazetto and here in Greifenstein with nothing to trouble us — free as the air."

"A man," said Hilda faintly but distinctly, "can only be *free* when he is a bachelor, a divorcé or a widower."

"Don't be parochial, Hilda, it is not like you. Your fortune and your position as an American abroad, to whom everything is permitted, place you far above such petty considerations." Goritzki had drawn away from her, though he still gazed into her eyes intently and his voice had grown hard and almost dictatorial. He frightened Hilda but she stood her ground.

"Count Goritzki," she said, "I will not be your mistress. That is what Society would call me and

it would not forget it, either, even if we could be married next year or later. Society never forgets even when it seems to forgive."

Goritzki's moustache went up. "So you love *Society*," he complained bitterly, "and not me!" Then he controlled himself and assumed the look of one gently dejected. "I must go back to my loneliness, deserted by every one," he said.

This was more than Hilda could bear. Two tears rolled down her cheeks. "Roman," she whispered, "I would do anything to make you happy. I will give up Society." Then she paused and looked frightened: "But what would Theodora say?"

Goritzki's nerves were on edge; he had drunk absinthe and slept ill. Just at this moment when he might have achieved all he wanted, his temper, as often happened with him, upset everything.

"Damn Theodora!" he cried in a voice that made Hilda spring to her feet. He looked like an evil spirit, a devilish light was in his eyes. "Let us get rid of that hag at once and for ever!"

Hilda, putting her hands before her eyes, fled away down the path without a word. Goritzki followed, striving to make her look at or listen to him in vain. Like a frightened rabbit Hilda ran to cover. She did not stop until she reached her own room, and flung herself on a long couch, her head, still with a hat on it, buried in the soft cushions.

Goritzki abandoned his pursuit at the front door, turned into his den, and going to the writing-table sat down with an oath, "Damn all women!" Bianca found him there after the tennis game was over in no mood to be trifled with.

Remenyi, meanwhile, much *intrigué* at seeing the flying figures emerge from the woods and make for the Castle, had strolled across to the bench and casually picked up the *Corriere de la Sera* of Milan. His eyes lighted at once on a paragraph which made him whistle, and say to himself, "Aha! So that was in the wind! No divorce this year for Goritzki and no rich American 'Soap King's widow'!"

This revelation rather upset Remenyi's previous solution. "However," he concluded, "if one can't get what one wants one can resign oneself to the attainable. La Bardi is still beautiful. She is rich and her spinster aunt still richer. Goritzki has two strings to his Cupid's bow. We may after all have the *raccomodage*; a permanent reconciliation with Leonora."

. . . . .  
Bianca, blooming from the air and sun and exercise, came up to Goritzki sitting at his writing-desk in the den. "Papa," she said, "should I not be going back to Bregenz?"

"Who has said anything about your going back to that convent?" asked Goritzki almost rudely.

Bianca blinked her eyes, but she stood her ground.

"I told you that Mamma and Aunt Olga will be leaving Rome to-day, and go straight back to Innsbruck, where the automobile is to be waiting to take them to Bregenz to get me. You asked me not to try to reach them with a letter before they left Rome and you said this morning that you did not wish me to surprise them at Innsbruck to-morrow night at the Hotel Sonne; surely then I must be taken back to Bregenz to the convent, to be ready for their coming on Saturday?"

"You talk like a time-table," said Goritzki laughing, but it was not a pleasant laugh.

Bianca half shut her eyes. She could look determined in spite of her chin. "Will you tell me what I am to do?"

"Stay here."

"But Mamma and Aunt Olga —"

"Let them come and fetch you here."

"But they will not know."

"They will find out soon enough at the convent."

"You would give them all that trouble?"

"My dear Bianca, do be reasonable. They would have to go there in any event to pay your bills and get your clothes. You told me you were to leave the convent with them. Your saying good-bye to the nuns is a matter of small importance."

Bianca was not satisfied, but she recognized the



reasonableness of what Goritzki said. "It seems strange that you should not let them know beforehand."

"That is my business," responded Goritzki with finality.

Bianca's mind was soon distracted from her own perplexities. The Mother Superior re-mailed to her an envelope containing a letter from her mother and a telegram from London. The latter was from Reginald Grafton: "Florence's mother hurt in motor accident. No hope. We sail to-morrow."

"That is to-day," thought Bianca. "Poor Florence, she will be sorry. How awful it all is. What a tragedy!" And Bianca decided to submit to Goritzki in the hope of that final happy re-union which was still her dream.

### III

Hilda's was a timid little rabbit soul that wants to run away from every disagreeable fact. To have a perpetual "salad day" chewing the lettuce of life in a sunny garden was her idea of perfect felicity. She was still a child.

The Goritzki of Venice had seemed to be the ideal companion in her Paradise, whispering soft nothings and recounting fairy-tales. The Goritzki of Greifenstein was another person altogether — brilliant and gay, but with a touch of hardness and even a dash of cruelty. Steel claws had come

through the velvet on that afternoon and Hilda was frightened and wanted to run away.

"It is time we went to London," she told Theodora that night, through the open door between their two bedrooms. Their maids had gone, leaving Theodora rather the worse for wear, with knobs of hair twisted on ribbons under a tight china-silk cap, disclosing a face from which the bloom had departed — a shiny coating of cold cream taking its place. A brilliant red silk kimono heightened the lurid effect of her willowy figure, distinctly visible underneath, and the glitter of her malicious eyes. She looked decidedly uncanny. Hilda stood in the doorway, her golden hair in two long braids, and an ample white silk and lace wrapper covering any suggestion of night-dress. Two small white feet thrust into sky-blue satin slippers showed below. She looked like an innocent little child and Theodora only required a broomstick and a black cat to be complete.

"All right," said Theodora, "I'm sure *I* am ready. London in the season is good enough for *me*."

"Theodora dear," faltered Hilda, "I am sometimes afraid of Count Goritzki. He is not the same as he was in Venice."

"Pshaw!" said Theodora, "*I* could manage him; not but what he'd be a handful — more of a one than Rivers, though *he* is bigger. I've always

told you Rivers was the one for you, you remember."

Hilda went to sleep that night thinking of Lord Rivers. He was so sunny and genial always, if he *was* fat, and there was not a single obstacle in the way of this noble suitor; not a stone to cause a ripple in the course of true love. Goritzki's beauty counted far less than it had done in Venice. Lord Rivers' star was in the ascendant at Greifenstein.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

ON Saturday afternoon of the same week, two eager women stepped from a motor-car and entered the Sacred Heart Convent near Bregenz. The Princess had glanced up at a window.

"I don't see her," she murmured anxiously, "nor Florence nor Kate Jago. I thought they would all three be looking out for us."

"I pray God she is not ill. I have not heard from her for nearly two weeks," said Leonora.

The Mother Superior met them smiling.

"Where is Bianca?" they asked with one voice.

"With her father at Greifenstein."

The Princess Olga was struck dumb. Leonora, who had not been ten years an actress for nothing, said,

"Oh, yes, we knew that, but we thought she would come back here in time to meet us."

When Leonora paused, her lips parted, her bosom heaving, the Mother Superior went to her writing-table and produced two letters. One was from Goritzki, enclosing the other.

"Reverend Mother,

"We have decided, my daughter and I, that she will remain here until her mother calls for her. As

she is leaving the convent in any event, this will save her the trouble of returning for only one day, and also give me the pleasure of a prolonged visit. She only regrets not to be able to take leave of those who have been so kind to her."

The second letter was sealed and addressed to Leonora. She tore it open with a hand that trembled.

"Dearest Mamma,

"It was good of you to let me come here. I have enjoyed it very much. Papa is so kind. Prince Ernest Greifenstein is here. We play tennis. He is *very* nice, and wishes to be remembered. I shall be ready whenever you come for me."

That was all.

"When did she go?" asked Leonora. The Princess was still speechless.

"On Monday. The Count brought your letter and came himself."

"A letter from me? May I see it? I seem to remember."

"Certainly."

The Mother Superior again went to the writing-table and produced a letter which she handed to Leonora. Leonora read it and passed it on to the Princess; who ran her eyes over it, clutched it in a grip of iron and still remained silent.

"May we keep this letter?" Leonora asked, noticing her aunt's grim retention of it.

"Certainly, Countess," answered the Mother Superior, dimly wondering at the Princess Olga's manner, so different from what she remembered.

"I hope that nothing is wrong in what I have done."

"Dear Mother, no," answered Leonora.

An hour later when the automobile was speeding back to Innsbruck, it was Leonora who collapsed speechless and the Princess who found voice.

"This," she said indicating the letter still clutched in her right hand, "is a forgery. He can be indicted."

"Oh, my child, my child!" gasped Leonora, the tears rolling down her cheeks. She looked like a Martyr Queen.

"My dear Leonora, Bianca is safe enough, and we must only get her away!"

"But I can never go there."

"*You* shan't. I will go to-morrow and bring her back with me to Innsbruck."

"But if he sets her against me?"

"For God's sake, Leonora! You know the angel Gabriel himself could not do that! He will undoubtedly cajole her about himself. But after all, what harm can that do her?"

"But can I get her away?"

"My dear Leonora, we have the agreement,

signed and sealed. That settles everything until Bianca is twenty-one, and then she can settle everything for herself. What have you to fear, really?"

"I don't know; I am frightened."

"Where is that agreement, by the way?" asked the Princess after a pause.

"Where it has always been, in my travelling chest, in the upper part of it."

"It should arrive then to-morrow with the other boxes that Fritz is bringing from the villa?"

"Yes."

"Fritz certainly ought to be in Innsbruck by to-morrow. I hope so for we may need that paper as a means of releasing Bianca," said the Princess.

"If Fritz takes the early train, as we ordered him to do, he should certainly reach Innsbruck to-morrow afternoon at the latest," answered Leonora.

The Princess put back the letter into her travelling bag. She did not look altogether unhappy.

"It is a very ill wind that blows *no* good," she remarked. "I am glad that Bianca is seeing Erni Greifenstein. He is a splendid young man."

Leonora was trying also to make the best of things, so she smiled as she said:

"Olgazia, I thought you had scratched him off the list."

"I have put him back *provisoirement*," she answered. "He is really worth all the rest of them

put together. I will have a serious talk with him in Vienna next winter. After all, the man who told me something I did not like about Ernest is himself a filthy fellow. *That* I know."



## CHAPTER XXIX

### I

ON Sunday nearly all of the guests (the English couple and Hilda and Theodora excepted) went to church at the village below the cliff. Some of them walked and others drove in motors. Bianca and Ernest Greifenstein went on foot.

"Are you not coming too, Papa?" she asked Goritzki, who stood hatless at the front door.

"No," he answered shortly.

"Your father never goes to church," Ernest Greifenstein remarked as they walked down by the carriage road together.

"I did not know that," said Bianca. Ernest Greifenstein gave her a swift and sharp glance and then he went on steadily.

"His mother was a saint and he made her think he had faith when he had none; but after her death and his marriage he gave up even any outward catholicism. However," he interrupted himself, "perhaps I ought not to tell you these things."

"On the contrary," answered Bianca gravely, "I wish to know the truth, even if it makes me sorry. Nevertheless," she pursued more cheerfully, "Papa

himself has told me that when he can afford it he will restore the chapel which was struck by lightning."

Prince Ernest stopped still.

"Did he really tell you that?" he asked.

"Almost. At any rate he said he had not yet done it because he had not had enough money."

Prince Ernest bit his lips and walked on in silence.

"It will be done some time. When poor Papa may be dead and gone, and you are there, you would restore it?" Bianca spoke plaintively.

"I promise you that if I am alive, it is the first thing that shall be done."

"Oh, thank you," said Bianca. "You know, with our ancient families, it is not the present only that matters; not one generation, but centuries, past and future."

The young man looked with admiration at Bianca's glowing face and big dark eyes. She was trying to be quite grown up.

"That is the kind of woman for a wife and mother to be, as well as a girl that one can love for herself," he thought; and a resolve grew within him to be carried out the next winter: for Prince "Erni" felt quite sure that he might hope; Bianca's eyes had already told him that.

They knelt together at the mass and came home in a motor car. Bianca went upstairs to change her dress. It was past eleven o'clock and breakfast was

at twelve. As she stepped through the door leading to the gallery on her way down, half an hour later, Bianca heard a motor-car snorting at the main entrance. Knowing that everybody had returned from church, she leaned over the railing to see who was coming in and beheld the Princess Olga, looking very grim and stately sweep through the hall below closely followed by Goritzki. They disappeared through the doorway that led into the den and the door closed behind them with a slam.

"My things are all packed. Aunt Olga will take me away with her, but perhaps she may stay to lunch. I know she would like to see Ernest." Bianca, behind his back, already called the Prince by his first name. She waited above in the gallery for the door to open. She did not dare to follow them into the den unbidden, as both Goritzki and the Princess had had the air of persons bent upon private conversation.

## II

"To what do I owe this pleasure?" Goritzki asked, motioning the Princess to a seat in the alcove and himself taking a chair that stood in front of his writing-desk.

"Without any waste of words," said the Princess, "I have come to get Bianca and I wish to take her away at once."

"Indeed!" said Goritzki, "that is something which must be talked over. It requires some *pour-parlers*."

"I don't know what you mean. I am at a loss to imagine why you suddenly made up your mind to see Bianca and to do it at any cost."

"It has cost me nothing worth speaking of. A delightful motor drive and the entertainment of a charming guest."

"Is that all?"

"It is all."

The Princess snorted and rose to her feet.

"Count Goritzki, will you kindly send for Bianca and let her go away with me at once? I do not wish to make a scene."

"My dear Princess," said Goritzki, still suave but getting dangerous, "My daughter leaves Greifenstein only on certain conditions."

"And they are?"

"Two hundred thousand crowns." Seeing the Princess's look of blank amazement, Goritzki laughed softly. "It pleases me to play the game of my ancestors, the great robber barons who swooped down upon the plains, carrying off worldly goods and sometimes hostages. I have a fair hostage and I want a fitting ransom."

The Princess was at the end of her patience.

"You scoundrel," she cried. "You sold the

child once already. Leonora gave half her fortune for her thirteen years ago and you relinquished all paternal rights."

"Did I?" Goritzki questioned. "My memory is not very retentive."

"But we have the paper drawn up and signed."

"Produce it!"

"I shall have it this afternoon. Meantime, however, I have a weapon still more potent."

"What is that?"

"I can have you branded as a forger. I can have you put in the penitentiary," and the Princess waved before his eyes the forged letter of Leonora. For a moment Goritzki was completely struck dumb. He knew that such a step, or even a knowledge of what he had done, would disgrace him forever in the eyes of Hilda. It only took him a second's thought, however, to view the situation from all sides. He had looked at first as though he would strike the Princess where she stood. Now he only laughed in her face and exclaimed:

"All right, go ahead!"

"What do you mean?"

"Brand me as a forger, clap me in the penitentiary as a felon for what was only, after all, a mere *ruse de guerre*. Do it, I say, and then afterwards," Goritzki bent his head and looked Princess Olga straight in the eyes, "*afterwards*, bring out

Bianca Goritzka, *my daughter*, at the Vienna Court balls and marry her to Ernest Greifenstein — if you can, eh?"

Goritzki ended his sentence laughing heartily, sat down in his chair once more, put his hands in his pockets, and stared up at the Princess with his moustache up as high as it would go and his white teeth gleaming. It was the Princess Olga's turn to be struck dumb and her knees weakened, but in another moment she recovered herself.

"Do you refuse to let Bianca go with me, Count Goritzki?" she asked.

"I do," he answered, rising from his chair and bowing, "unless you bring the ransom and lay it right there," he slapped his hand upon the projecting shelf of his writing-desk.

"I shall come back at five o'clock," said the Princess.

"*A votre service, Madame,*" he rejoined and escorted her to the front door.

Bianca waved her hand from the gallery where she still stood watching, expecting to be summoned; but the Princess never looked up. The motor drove away and Goritzki re-entered the hall.

"Papa!" called Bianca, "is Aunt Olga gone?"

"She will be back this afternoon about five," answered Goritzki, "and will probably take you with her then." He offered no further explanation but

went back to his writing desk, which he had left open. He sat down and touched an electric bell which lay ready to his hand.

"Is Nepomuc here?"

"He arrived this morning, Erlaucht," answered one of the Dromios.

"Let him come in."

Nepomuc entered the room a few minutes later and remained for half an hour. He told Goritzki that his engagement at the circus in London was just finished and in June he should go to America for a year or more. Just now he had nothing to do, professionally speaking.

"You shall be in my service then, to accompany me wherever I may go for the next six weeks," said Goritzki. "I am as yet uncertain about my movements, but you will stay here and hold yourself in readiness."

"I would follow the Erlaucht through fire and water," said Nepomuc, and he meant it.

### III

When Nepomuc went out he encountered his father, who eyed him suspiciously. Johann Swoboda had met the Princess Olga as he was on his way back from church, he and his wife and four of the children in a station wagon. The Princess had stopped her automobile and beckoned to him. After shaking hands she said in a low voice,

"Johann Swoboda, I came to get my niece and he won't let me take her away."

"I have seen the young lady twice, out walking," answered Johann, "so beautiful, like my father's Herrin, her grandmother. She told me she was here by the Signora's especial permission."

"That is not true, Johann. He has pretended it and he is going to make trouble. I shall perhaps come back to-day, with the paper which the Count signed thirteen years ago. You remember about it. My niece wrote and told you. The paper in which he renounced his claim. When I show that paper to the Herr Graf he will be obliged to give Bianca up to me. Just now he said that he would only let us have her back upon payment of two hundred thousand crowns ransom. He said she was his hostage."

"For God's sake, Durchlaucht," groaned old Johann Swoboda, "are we going back to feudal times?"

"Much worse, Johann," said the Princess Olga, "this is modernism, a heathen revival — 'Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die.' But tell me, can you bring Bianca to us to-morrow in case I do not come to-day again? Could you manage to bring her without the Count's knowledge?"

"*Gewiss!*" answered Johann. "The young lady is not a prisoner as yet. She would not, of course, know how to escape alone, but I can bring her safe,



never fear. A train stops at the station of Matrei at eight o'clock in the morning. The Erlaucht will not be awake." The Princess drove on with a light heart.

If Fritz should not come back from Italy with the chest until that night, Bianca might get away in the morning early, and they could all three set off for Vienna in the motor car. For the Princess had made up her mind. She would take the precious document to her old uncle, Prince Ernest Leuchtenberg and place it in his hands, so that his man of law could at any moment pursue Goritzki if he attempted again to lay a finger on Bianca. She wondered why that had not been done long ago, at the very first, instead of allowing so important a paper to stray about in a travelling-case. Leonora had always said that it was just as safe as her jewels. But people are robbed every day of their jewels.

When Johann Swoboda met his son, Nepomuc, he did not greet him with paternal tenderness.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

Nepomuc grinned.

"I arrived this morning, my father, after you had gone to church. I have come from England and the Erlaucht has engaged me to be with him (as his confidential servant) until I sail for America in June."

Nepomuc looked mischievous. He remembered

the time when he had caught his father listening. His father remembered it too and his suspicions were aroused. Some more mischief might be hatching against his beloved mistress, and her daughter who looked so like the old "Herrin."

Johann could not imagine what the trouble might be, but he was prepared to defend them both with the last drop of blood in his body. He was a very shrewd old man and he began to wonder what had happened the year before in Munich and what the words he had overheard could mean: "When she returns with a golden harvest from America." The Signora had not gone to America, it is true, but according to the Princess, here was the Erlaucht demanding two hundred thousand crowns as if he meant to get it. Now, as a man of business, Johann Swoboda knew that Goritzki could not extort another crown from the Signora, so long as that signed agreement existed, if it was in her possession. *Was* it? Johann Swoboda sucked in his breath and drew down his bushy eyebrows over his eyes and he came to a determination. It was a hard thing that he resolved to do but the cause he served was just.

Johann Swoboda knew that Goritzki was careless about his keys. No thief could enter Greifenstein. Johann knew that Goritzki never took the trouble to transfer his bunch of keys to the waistcoat-pocket of his evening clothes, because he him-

self had often gone to fetch them when his master and he had held business consultations after dinner. Johann's face turned crimson as he meditated over this fact; but it did not shake his determination. He, the tried and trusted head forester and steward, made up his mind that on that very evening during dinner, he would take his master's keys and search through his master's secret drawer.

## CHAPTER XXX

### I

**B**IANCA looked in vain for her aunt that afternoon. The Princess did not appear; she and Leonora were otherwise occupied. Consternation reigned in the apartment at the Hotel Goldene Sonne.

Fritz arrived with the chest at four o'clock in the afternoon. It was placed in the salon, and when they were left alone, the Princess said to Leonora: "The keys, quick. Let us get out the precious paper at once."

Leonora turned the small key in the padlock and pulled open the drawer. Inside lay the jewel-cases, a few last year's contracts (one for a season in Rome) and the familiar blue envelope. The Princess Olga pounced upon it and extracted its contents. Then a scream rang out — a cry of pain and horror — which made Leonora's heart stand still.

Behind her, in the centre of the room, stood the Princess. The blue envelope lay on the floor at her feet, and in her hand she held a large sheet of perfectly blank white paper. There was no explanation possible. Leonora confessed that she never had opened the envelope to look at its contents since

the Archbishop, her uncle, had given it to her, thirteen years before. She had not needed to read it over again, the sight of the envelope had been enough.

“And the keys have never left you?”

“They have been under my pillow every night except for the two days when my bag was lost in Munich last year.”

The Princess shook her head. “Even if a thief had been able to open that drawer — to enter your room unobserved — he surely would not have known about that paper, and he surely would have taken your jewels.”

“But that vague warning, sent through Reginald Grafton last year?”

“Johann Swoboda himself reassured us at Bregenz in September.”

Cudgel their brains as they might, they could make nothing out of it — only the dreadful fact remained. Leonora no longer possessed the paper, and Bianca was held by Goritzki as a hostage at Greifenstein.

They dined at seven o'clock in their salon, and ate scarcely anything. They did not want to talk, but they could not bear to go to bed, for they knew well that they should not sleep a wink.

At half-past nine o'clock, there came a tap at the door of the salon. The maids and Fritz had been dismissed, so Leonora herself cautiously

opened the door. In the ante-chamber stood Johann Swoboda. He could scarcely speak; triumph and shame contended within him. "My noble ladies, I have opened my master's desk and I have robbed him of *this*." Down upon the table in the centre of the salon he laid a sheet of paper. The Princess snatched it up and saw at a glance that it was the agreement signed and sealed, by which Goritzki had, for a consideration, surrendered his daughter Bianca to her mother.

The Princess would like to have kissed Johann Swoboda then and there, but she controlled herself. She took his hand. "Johann," she said, "you have robbed a robber, and you return this paper to its rightful owner."

"I know, I know," said Johann, "but it was a hard thing for me to do, all the same."

The old man then began to speak hastily and in a business-like manner, very different from his first appearance. The thing was done and off his mind now. "My Ladies," he said, "I came here in the Herr Graf's automobile (my son drove me) so as to come as quickly as possible, and I must return at once, for there is something else to be done. I thought about it on the way here. That paper was abstracted from the envelope, was it not?"

"Yes, yes," answered Leonora. "The envelope has been all the time in the drawer, but a blank sheet of paper was inside. We can't think —"

"I know, I know," interrupted the old man. "It must have happened in Munich, and *he* did it."

"Who?"

"My son, Nepomuc," answered Johann sadly, "the *Schlange Mann*. He would do anything on earth for the Erlaucht. He would stop at nothing. But," he broke off, "there is no time now to discuss how he did it. Please, could you give me some paper, written upon — something which might resemble this one — to put in its place. Time presses. I have an idea."

Leonora, the actress, laughed aloud. "I have it, I have it!" she cried. Running over to the desk, she took out one of the old contracts made for a season in Rome that lay in the jewel drawer.

"The very thing," said Johann Swoboda.

That same night at twelve o'clock, when the Castle was falling asleep, the faithful steward made his round to see if all was in order. He paused in the den, where the guests had finished singing and laughing an hour before, and he told the sleepy Dromio, who was accompanying him, to go out upon the terrace and see if a fan had been left there. "One of the Italian ladies thought she had put it down on the table after the coffee had been served there in the moonlight. Take the lantern and search for it, and then meet me at the front door."

When the Dromio had disappeared, swiftly

Johann unlocked the drawer in the writing-desk and inserted the blue envelope containing the theatre contract far back where the other paper had lain. Swiftly he closed the drawer and locked it again. Then he shook with suppressed laughter. "I have got quite even now, I think, with Master Nepomuc Swoboda, the *Schlange Mann*!"

Johann met his Dromio son at the front door, who had not found the fan. Then he took the lantern, said good-night, and trudged off to his own house to bed.

## II

At half-past six o'clock the next morning Johann Swoboda had replaced his master's keys in the pocket of the waistcoat which hung, together with his coat and trousers, ready brushed at Goritzki's door, waiting for the valet to take them in at nine o'clock.

The old forester had decided that it would not be prudent for him to be implicated in Bianca's escape. He was a very shrewd old man. He tapped discreetly upon the door of Prince Ernest Greifenstein's bedroom. The Prince, who was half asleep, said, "Come in," wondering who could intrude at such an early hour. He was very fond of Johann, whom he had known ever since he made his first visit to Greifenstein with his mother, nearly twenty years before, as a boy of six — the year that Gor-



itzki's mother died. "Good-morning, Johann," he said. "Is anything wrong?"

The old man came up to the bedside. "Durchlaucht," he said, "the Signora wants her daughter back."

"But she is going back. She expected to go yesterday afternoon, only the Princess did not come for her."

"The Herr Graf won't let her go," said Johann Swoboda. "I went last night to see the ladies, and they told me so."

"But he has no right to keep the Countess Bianca, Johann; you must know that, you who are an old and trusted servant. We all know in my family that the Count surrendered her thirteen years ago, and we think it was for a large sum of money, I don't mind telling you."

"I know it was," said the old man; "but, Durchlaucht, the Count is trying, now, to make trouble. I will serve my mistress before all things, and I tell you this. Could you not take the young Countess to Innsbruck — you who are a cousin?"

Prince Ernest laughed. "I think they would forgive the indiscretion," he said.

"Would the Durchlaucht dress now, and have coffee in a half-hour, and be ready to motor down the hill in time to catch the eight o'clock train?"

"Agreed, Johann. But will the young lady be ready?"

"I shall see to that," Johann answered, and then he added: "And would the Durchlaucht not mention that I have had any part in this matter? It would cost me my place and the whole family (except that circus-trick player!) would be in disgrace."

"I will shoulder the whole responsibility," answered Prince Ernest. "I will simply say, 'The young lady asked me and I went.'"

"God bless you, Durchlaucht." Johann stooped and kissed the young man's hand.

By the Prince's orders everything was got ready, and the young people set forth at half-past seven. Bianca was radiant. "How kind it is of you to suggest this," she said.

"I thought you seemed anxious to get away," replied Prince Ernest.

"I am crazy to see Mamma. I suppose Papa will be furious. He told me last night that he wanted to keep me a week or two longer, and he seemed to be very dictatorial—quite different in manner from what he had been before; although, of course, you know I have only just made Papa's acquaintance."

"I know," Prince Ernest answered.

When they reached Innsbruck, they walked across

the square to the Golden Sonne, just opposite the station. "Good-bye," Prince Ernest said, "I shall go back at once. There is a train in fifteen minutes, and the motor awaits my return at the station. Au revoir in Vienna!"

## CHAPTER XXXI

### I

**G**ORITZKI'S rage knew no bounds when he discovered that Bianca was gone. This happened at midday just before breakfast.

"Do you mean to say that she went off early this morning with you?" he asked.

Prince Ernest looked at him very haughtily. "Certainly!" he answered. "My cousin asked me to take her to her mother. She said her visit here was only for a few days. I took her to Innsbruck. I am entirely responsible for it."

Goritzki did not dare to say more. Everything was going very wrong. Hilda was leaving after breakfast, still feeling hurt and ill at ease with him. He could not bring things back to where they were before; she avoided seeing him alone.

When he stood at the door of the motor saying good-bye, Theodora Haines grinned at him behind Hilda's back and shouted: "We'll see Rivers in London!"

"And you will no doubt set the Thames on fire!" hissed Goritzki, through his clenched teeth.

It was a very unsatisfactory parting. Hilda and

her millions seemed fading away and the Monte Carlo winnings were being scattered broadcast in gay festivals. Greifenstein was ablaze once more. The English Lord and his wife and the *gemüthlich* Bavarian couple departed and a large party of young and very rollicking Venetians made their appearance. Things began to grow faster and more furious. Prince Ernest left for Trieste on his way to join his ship at Pola. Remenyi lingered anxious to see the fun.

Goritzki took to deep drinking again, and his face began to have unhealthy splotches that made him look old and coarse. His singing voice grew husky.

In the second week of May the Italian guests flitted away, back to Venice, and Remenyi returned to Saint Petersburg.

Goritzki tried to get his wits together and to think over his next step. He would demand the two hundred thousand crowns, and if they were not handed over to him, he would take legal steps toward having his daughter given over to her lawful guardian until she should come of age.

One day he sent for Nepomuc, who found him seated before his desk, writing. "I want you to take this letter to Vienna yourself," he said, "and present it to the Signora, asking her to give you the answer. They are living in the Wallnerstrasse at the Princess's apartment, and are going the first

week in June to Lake Como. The Count Remenyi told me this."

Goritzki opened the drawer, and putting his hand far back, he drew out the big blue envelope. "I don't know whether to destroy this agreement and make them draw up another, or just sell them this one back again. That might be the simplest thing to do, since it is already signed."

As he spoke, Goritzki drew forth the document and unfolded it. It was the first time he had looked closely at the inside of it. He never had doubted for a moment that it was the one he wanted. He had felt absolutely convinced of it. How could he have so deceived himself?

Goritzki jumped up from his chair and turned upon Nepomuc in a maniac fury. "How dare you?" he cried. "How *dare* you have cheated me all this time? To think that *I* should be the dupe of such a misshapen creature! Why I would have sworn in any court of justice that I saw the signatures and the seal, when I put the paper away, the day you brought it here, and I have never given it a thought since!"

"Erlaucht, for God's sake, what is the matter?"

Goritzki slapped the document down upon the desk. "You fool, you ass!" he cried. "You never brought the paper to me at all — the real one. This is some wretched agreement about play-acting."

"In God's name, Erlaucht!" shouted Nepomuc, quite beside himself; "I also saw with my own eyes both the signatures!"

Goritzki strove to keep his anger within bounds. "When did you see them, you dolt?" he asked.

"I looked at the paper so as to make sure, by the light of a night lamp in the bedroom at Munich, before I took it away."

"And what could you see? You can't read Italian?"

"I saw the Signora's name," began Nepomuc.

"Of course you did," snarled Goritzki. "There it is." He pointed to Leonora's signature.

"But I saw the Erlaucht's too!" protested Nepomuc.

"Oh, come! This is too much!" Goritzki held up the paper. "Look at *that*! Tell me how it got here, in my secret drawer. Will you answer that question?"

And Nepomuc was speechless.

## II

That afternoon a letter came from Hilda, written in London.

"I hope you won't be angry," she said, "but I really must not be *engaged* to you any longer. It is really not *right*. I never could consent to the arrangement you proposed. I don't mean to back out from marrying you. If you were free (if you were

a divorced man or else a widower) I would marry you to-morrow, but I can't be *engaged* to you as things are now. You understand?"

Then Goritzki's hatred broke loose. He hated Leonora, Bianca, everybody and everything. He even for the moment hated Hilda, now that she seemed growing difficult, with that one flimsy little scruple about "Society" which she fancied to be morality, as if "Society" really cared a hang in these days what anybody did, so long as they had money. If "Society" could glut itself, what more did it want? What questions would it ask?

That night, Goritzki, who was all alone, drank first champagne and then absinthe until he lay senseless on the floor, and was carried to bed by the two Dromios. After this night he began to make plans, and sat weaving webs like a spider in his den, watching for news of Leonora's departure from Vienna.

Goritzki sent Nepomuc up there once or twice to inquire. The Snake-Man did not dare to show himself to Fritz, his former friend, fearing that Leonora and the Princess might hear of him and know that he was spying upon them, so he hovered about in the neighborhood, observing their movements, and questioning strangers.

The second time, Nepomuc returned with the news that the ladies in the Wallnerstrasse would close the apartment on the 6th of June and meant to go in their motor-car to Italy by way of Innsbruck, Bozen



and Meran, and over the Stelvio Pass to Bormio. From there they would go for the summer to the Villa Bardi on Lake Como.

“What a pity you are not a widower!” Goritzki still dreamed of Hilda and of her millions as the most desirable things in life; and those words of hers haunted him. Like a spider he watched and waited for the motor-car to arrive at Innsbruck somewhere about the 6th of June.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### I

**A**FTER a swift voyage on an ocean greyhound, Reginald Grafton and Florence set foot in New York, and went at once from the Custom House to the station to take the Boston train, lunching on the way.

No time was to be lost. This was a race with Death. The last despatch said, "Still alive but no hope, anxious to see Florence." They spent the night at the Hotel Touraine, for the telephone said, "Sleeping quietly. Come to-morrow."

They all three went to mass at seven the next morning and at 9 o'clock, Reginald Grafton's motor stood at the door of the hotel. He saw them off, and then went to his room and said a prayer for his false wife. Florence and Kate Jago, after an hour's drive, arrived at a stone-built house in Beverly, which opened at the back upon a wide terrace overlooking the sea. Here (to the house of a friend where she and Jimmy Blake were to dine) Constance's crushed body had been brought. A solemn butler opened the door and a tall lady, beautifully dressed in a lace-trimmed white frock, came

out of a small reception-room. Her eyes were red and she dabbed them with a diaphanous scrap of linen cambric, also lace-trimmed. She kissed Florence with a damp and perfumed kiss. "Go upstairs, dear," she whispered, "Sparrow will show you the way."

"Kate must come too," declared Florence with decision, slipping her arm through Kate's.

The butler, who quite belied his name (he was so clean and silent), went before them up the wide stairway, covered with a thick red carpet, and noiselessly the three arrived on the floor above at an open door which led into an upstairs library and lounge-room. Here two men were seated; one of them Florence knew at once must be Jimmy Blake, but poor Jimmy's face had lost all its freshness. It was quite livid, with splotches of red, and his eyes were swollen with weeping.

The other man was smooth-faced and blue-eyed, with indefinite features, sandy and silvery hair, and a very soft voice. He made Florence think of a fresh new cake of perfumed French soap. She guessed at a glance that he was the doctor, and was assured of it when he came forward, with a suave smile that did not part his lips. Jimmy Blake remained in a leather armchair by the window and he held to his teary eyes a handkerchief which concealed his face. He evidently felt shy of Florence.

"My dear young lady," said the doctor very kindly, taking Florence by the arm, and advancing slowly toward the door of an adjoining room, "your poor mother is very ill, very ill *indeed*. I may say — dying. You must not be with her more than ten minutes, and above all things, don't let her, on any account whatever, imagine that you think she is going to die! Preserve your self-control, my dear girl. That is the most important rule for you to observe."

"But there is hope, then?" faltered Florence.

"Not an atom of hope," responded the doctor; "that is just what makes it so imperative that she sha'n't *know* her condition. Why worry her, poor lady, just at the end?"

The kind-hearted man of medicine turned upon Kate Jago, who was following: "*She* is not to go in," he said briefly, and with a quite professional air of authority, entirely different from the soothing tone meant for encouragement to the afflicted.

Florence took Kate's hand. "Kate goes with me *everywhere*," she announced decidedly. The doctor drew back.

"Since your young mistress wishes it," he said shortly, "you may go in, but please don't speak, even in a whisper. Mrs.—er—Blake must suppose that only her daughter is in the room. She asked to see her *alone*."

"Kate does not count," said Florence, resolutely.

"She has been with me ever since Mamma went away." The words sounded hard, but the child only meant to state the fact, not to criticise.

The doctor opened the door softly, and beckoned to a very trim, trained nurse, young and pretty, who jumped up quickly from a chair near the window, where she had been reading over a letter which evidently had left an agreeable impression.

"Miss Capron," said the doctor, speaking in the doorway, "Mrs. Blake's daughter has arrived, and she — and this person — will come into the room for ten minutes; no more. Kindly leave them alone, for that time; by your watch, please. I must hurry away for an hour, to see a very sick patient. Besides, of course," this in a very soft whisper, "there is nothing more to be done here. The patient is suffering no pain?"

"No pain whatever," said the nurse. "She is conscious now, but very weak. Her heart is fluttering, but you said stimulants were dangerous."

"Not to be thought of," said the doctor hastily. "She may die of internal hæmorrhage any moment. Why hasten it? We'd better leave her to Nature, since there is *no pain*."

The doctor hastened away, leaving the trim trained nurse mounting guard before the closed door, watch in hand, as she counted the minutes. She glanced now and then with a look of mingled sympathy and curiosity at the rueful figure of

Jimmy Blake, crumpled up in the armchair near the window, crying.

## II

"Is that Florence?" asked a faint voice from the bed. Constance was whiter than the lace-trimmed pillow upon which her blonde head was lying; of a more deadly whiteness. She would have seemed to be already a corpse but that the pale violet lids fluttered over her eyeballs, and through the open mouth, pitifully drawn down at the corners, came long gasps for breath.

"Yes, Mamma dear," said Florence in a steady voice, slipping her hand from Kate Jago's and kneeling beside the bed, while Kate backed away and stood near the door.

"I did not know you were in America," said Constance slowly. Each word was an effort.

"Papa brought me the moment we heard."

"Your papa, dear, is the best man I have ever known. I always said he was *too* good." The dying woman's eyes opened and she seemed to gain strength at the thought of what she wanted to say: "I might have been a very different mamma to you, Florence. That is what I wanted to say. Only don't blame Jimmy Blake! He is a good fellow, dear, and he has borne a lot." Constance paused a moment, and stretched out her trembling white hand in which the veins were only little grooves, empty

of blood. She touched Florence's hair lightly, as the child knelt by the bedside.

"You have been going to a convent," she said, "and I heard that you have become a Roman Catholic. I said 'nonsense' at the time, but I am really glad now. There is another thing I wanted so much to say to you. I told Miss Capron yesterday that I wished you were here, and she said, 'She'll be coming over, Madam, by the time you get well.'" Florence began to cry, and remembering the doctor's injunction, took up a corner of the sheet and furtively soaked up the falling tears.

Constance noticed this gesture, and the poor depressed mouth suddenly turned up at the corners in a radiant smile, like a flash of sunlight.

"Are you really sorry, dear?" she asked in wonder.

"But you won't die!" asserted Florence, remembering the doctor.

"I'm so desperately weak," murmured Constance, "and you have only ten minutes to stay. I *must* say one thing before you go," she pursued hurriedly. "Remember, child, that I never was taught to do anything but what I wanted to do. Dear Mamma was so strong herself that she always said, 'Follow your own bent. You'll come out all right.' And, Florence, dear, I followed my bent and I have come out all *wrong*. It is not Mamma's fault," Constance added hurriedly, and then she began to

gasp and speak with more effort. "Remember one thing, I was not even baptized." The dying woman closed her eyes, seeming too exhausted to speak more.

Suddenly just behind her child, a voice said slowly and softly:

"Should you wish to be baptized, ma'am?"

Constance started into life as though a galvanic wire had touched her.

"Kate," she cried, "Kate Jago, you here and what are you saying?"

"I can baptize you, ma'am, if you really wish it," said Kate as quietly as though she were offering to wash her former mistress's face. Florence stood up and stepped aside. A radiant smile flashed across the dying woman's face, and she whispered:

"Oh, yes, Kate, please!"

Kate Jago advanced to the bedside, holding in her left hand a glass of water which she had filled from a carafe on the table. Constance waited, dimly wondering. Swiftly Kate poured a little stream upon the white forehead, wetting the fringe of yellow hair that hung limp about the temples.

"I baptize thee in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost," said Kate in a steady voice, and then she wiped gently the white face with a soft handkerchief. Constance looked up bewildered, and then exclaimed with the same flash of a sudden smile:



"Kate Jago, you are an angel!"

"Sure, Mrs. Grafton," said Kate, letting slip the name, "I am only a faulty Irish girl but I'm a good *Catholic*."

"Am I really baptized, Kate?" asked Constance.

"Really and truly, ma'am," answered Kate and then she pursued with an effort. "There is wan thing, ma'am, you might say, if you've a mind to say it; that is to tell God you are sorry if you've ever offended Him."

"God knows, Kate, I am sorry."

Florence put her arm about the pillow and bent her head to kiss her mother's face.

"Lord, have mercy upon me a sinner," said Kate, looking straight into her mistress's eyes.

"Lord, have mercy upon me a sinner," repeated Constance, looking upward.

The door softly opened and the trim, trained nurse entered noiselessly, watch in hand. "The ten minutes are up," she whispered, "you must go at once, please."

Constance, who had closed her eyes like a tired child, opened them on hearing these words and knew that the parting had come. Raising herself suddenly from the pillow, she sat up quite straight and flung her arms around Florence's neck in a last embrace.

"Good-bye, good-bye, my child!" she almost shrieked. Then her arms loosened, her eyes fell

wide open staring at the ceiling (as if they saw something) and with a queer sound in her throat, she sank back upon the pillow, dead. Before Florence and Kate could realise what had happened, Miss Capron hustled them out of the room and when they passed through the door she went over to the window and said softly to the heap of clothes in the armchair:

"Mr. Blake, it is all over. I am going to 'phone to the doctor."

A woe-begone and mottled face was lifted and the swollen eyes looked piteously at Florence. The child crossed the room.

"Poor Mr. Blake," she said, putting out her hand, "I am sorry for you."

Jimmy broke down. "God bless you," he sobbed, "I sha'n't forget what you've said." As he staggered into the room where the dead woman lay, Florence and Kate Jago left the house.

"Miss Florence," said Kate, as they drove back to Boston, "your Mamma will go to Heaven. Don't you worry about that."

### III

An hour later, the doctor and the trained nurse stood beside the bed where Constance lay, looking like a child asleep. Everything had been straightened and tidied, as her mother, Edith Wilkinson, who had gone home that morning for a few hours'

rest, had been summoned by telephone and was expected from one moment to another.

"Just how did it happen?" asked the doctor.

"That I can't tell exactly," replied Miss Capron. "I should say that Mrs. Blake imprudently sat up in bed and threw her arms about the child's neck, and that the emotion and exertion brought on the internal hæmorrhage which you say she died of. I saw her start up from the pillow just as I opened the door when the ten minutes were up."

"Of course that was quite enough—that sudden exertion," nodded the doctor. "With the internal injury and laceration, the rupture of a large vessel was bound to come sooner or later."

"But," asserted Miss Capron impressively, "something queer had been taking place in the room all the same. That Irish woman who was told to keep back was standing close to the bed, holding a glass of water and Mrs. Blake's hair is damp, as you can see for yourself, although I've wiped it, and the pillow was quite wet. I had to change the slip."

"Some Popish incantation or other perhaps," smiled the doctor. "I know there is something called 'extreme unction' because that has been done to some of my Catholic patients; but it is a rubbing in of oil. In fact I know it is greasy, from autopsies."

"Whatever the Irish woman *did*," said Miss

Capron sententiously, "it could not have been good for the patient. It must have excited poor Mrs. Blake."

"Never mind now, Miss Capron. It was really, you know, only a question of touch and go with Mrs. Blake. That thunderstorm would have finished her yesterday, if it had come nearer. You remember she was so afraid of thunder and lightning; a very nervous temperament, poor thing. How pretty she is! I knew her as a little girl, Miss Capron. I attended her when she had measles and I was just beginning to practise.

"She never had quite a fair chance, you know. That fellow, Grafton, was and is such a prig. But he was the finest match going at that time and very handsome too. Poor Edith Wilkinson!" The doctor looked out of the window, hearing a motor. "There she comes. Be careful, Miss Capron, not to tell her anything except that Florence Grafton came and saw her mother, and that it made Mrs. Blake very happy and that she died smiling."

"That is all right, Dr. Bagot," said Miss Capron. "You know I'm not a talker. I only thought I'd mention it to you (about the Irish woman)."

Miss Capron was right in her estimate of herself. She was very discreet and a great favourite with doctors, because she carried out their orders conscientiously and punctually, not trying to practise medicine on her own hook, as the highly trained

female is nearly always tempted to do; often yielding to the temptation.

Dr. Bagot met Edith Wilkinson (his first love) at the front door.

“Poor Edith,” he said kindly, taking both her hands. “Constance died without pain and we kept the truth from her to the very last! She enjoyed seeing Florence and no one could wish for a better death. I know you will bear up. Try to comfort poor Jimmy. *He* is quite hysterical.”

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### I

**T**HE mountain air was crisp and clear on the morning of the 10th of June at Trafoi. It was scented in the meadow by the breath of clover, and just a whiff (not a taint) of fresh manure was wafted from the brown log-built stable, seeming to harmonise with the genial crow of a rooster and the chatter of a mountain stream that tumbled past the stable, not seeming to mind in its cheerful bustle what it carried down with it and pitched into the glacier torrent in the gorge below.

“Mountain streams always seem pure and clean, but they are *not*,” asserted the Princess Olga. “Do you remember, Leonora, our poor old servant Gottlieb, who insisted once on drinking from a sparkling cataract by the wayside, as we were driving through the Schwartzwald, and what gripes he had that night? The maid woke me up. He had knocked at her door and thought he was dying. Do you remember? And I gave him a good big dose of morphia. I always carry tablets for an emergency. He was quite all right next day. But I have always remembered never to drink from these

pure mountain streams, which seem to flow out of the clear blue sky."

They were walking back to the hotel through the meadow after a six o'clock mass at the little church. In the foreground, cows were grazing with a cheerful clink of bells. Along the narrow path, a young girl came toward them, carrying a heavy basket strapped to her shoulders and laden with grass, field-flowers and big thistles, piled high behind her head. She was a sturdy girl of about fifteen, her hair was braided in two light brown pig-tails, and she had bright blue eyes and a cheerful, tanned face, through which a rosy colour glowed upon her cheeks.

The girl smiled sweetly as she passed them, showing her white teeth. "*Grüss' Gott!*" she said.

Leonora stopped her. "Have you come far, child?"

"From over there beyond the forest, the other side of the big hotel. I bring a load twice every day to the stable yonder."

"Is it not very heavy, child?"

"One gets used to it!" replied the peasant girl, with another cheerful smile, and she passed on, bearing her heavy load.

"I'd rather do that than be a seamstress in a city," asserted Bianca.

"We all have our burdens," rejoined the Princess Olga, "and only the Lord can make them light!

But, children, we must hurry back to breakfast, for the day is bright now and we must get away early. The Stelvio has just been opened, and the snow cleared away, but a storm may come at any moment and block it for a day or two. It is an awful road to go over in an automobile and I (for one) never should be willing to try it."

Their own motor-car had, in fact, crossed over the Stelvio the day before, going to the Baths of Bormio, on the Italian side of the pass. The three ladies had kept with them only their dressing-bags and a few warm rugs and wraps. Fritz accompanied them and was to sit on the box of the four-horse landau, hired at the Trafoi Hotel.

The maids and other impedimenta had been sent three days before by rail from Innsbruck, and were to await them at the villa on Lake Como.

As they walked back to their seven o'clock breakfast, the mountains looked glorious. Purple shadows lay below in the valley; then came the fresh green woods and pastures wet with dew, and, high above, the eternal snow-fields shining golden in the first rays of the sun.

In front of them loomed the majestic pile of the Ortler group, the white "spitz" at the top piercing the blue heavens, pure and exalted as the highest peak of the Jungfrau. To the right of it bulged that hoary mass of brown-grey rock, the Madatsch; like a gigantic pine-cone with snow-filled clefts.



Bianca shivered with pleasure. "Nothing could be more sublime," she said, "trees, rocks, snow and sky — all the great and beautiful and awful things in nature brought together. It makes one think of the great epic poets: of Dante and of Milton."

Two hours later, the four-horse carriage was beginning the apparently interminable zigzag ascent just below Franzenshöhe, a wayside inn much frequented by travellers in carriages in the old days, being the usual stopping-place for a midday meal; but as they had started at eight o'clock, they expected to reach the summit of the Pass for luncheon before one; and their halting-place was already in sight, far above at the Ferdinandshöhe — a white hotel with a red roof at the edge of a field of eternal snow, nine thousand feet above the sea.

Suddenly, far below them and round the corner overlooking Trafoi, there arose a quivering noise, hardly perceptible at first, like the deep bass pedal of an organ. The carriage had just turned a sharp curve immediately beyond Franzenshöhe, and was now facing the valley above Trafoi.

Leonora looked down at the ribbon of road below (which they had traversed an hour before), and she saw, shooting forth from a clump of fir-trees, a gray thing like a poisonous insect, speeding along the line of road as though in pursuit of its prey.

"What a horrid beast that motor-car would ap-

pear to be to any one who had never seen one before," she said, pointing to the panting monster. "It looks like a gigantic hornet."

"Fritz," called the Princess, "ask the *Kutscher* if that automobile is not going at a reckless speed."

The driver of the carriage, who was walking beside the leaders, went to the edge of the road and looked over. "*Gott im Himmel!*" he cried, "such a speed was never seen on the Stilsfer Joch before. They ought to be fined, but who is to catch them? They must not overtake us until I get around the next turn, when we shall have the inside; for I can't answer for the horses. They are used to easy-going cars, but this one is the devil."

As he spoke, the driver swung himself up to his seat on the box, and whipped his horses into a trot. The bells jangled, the leaders sprang forward.

"We shall make it, I think!" cried the *Kutscher*.

On came the monster, roaring nearer and nearer; it was a Fiat machine, and white smoke flew out behind its track.

Around the curve swung the carriage, safe now inside against the cliff. The coachman and Fritz jumped down and sprang to the leaders' heads. The three ladies leapt out, the Princess ordered it, and they ran swiftly along a foot-path that skirted the mountain-side and made a short cut, not very steep, to a little house a mile farther on, called Franz Joseph's Hütte. The Princess pointed to it —

"We shall go on ahead and wait for you there," she cried.

By this time, the automobile had also swung around the bend. It rushed past the empty carriage, almost grazing the wheels. The wheel horses quivered and shrank, while the two leaders strove to dash forward. But Fritz and the *Kutscher* standing at their heads, held them fast, and no harm was done.

Then Fritz beheld a gruesome thing. The speed of the motor-car slackened almost immediately; the dreadful noise died away, and the person on the back seat (there were only two people in the car — himself behind and the chauffeur in front) turned about and stared at Fritz through a pair of goggles. But this proceeding alone was not what made Fritz shiver. It was the fact that the man's shoulders remained quite motionless,—only the head moved, and it turned quite around and looked straight at Fritz over its own shoulder.

"*Mein Gott — der Schlange Mann!*" gasped Fritz.

"What did you say?" asked the driver, who had observed nothing unusual.

"I spoke to myself," Fritz replied.

The mysterious motor-car melted away in the distance, and they saw it no more.

. . . . .  
At the Franz Joseph's Hütte, the three ladies re-

sumed their seats in the carriage; at the Ferdinands-höhe, they stopped for two hours for breakfast and to rest the horses. After a three hours' drive down through the wonderful gorge, where the River Adda springs forth from the solid rock, they arrived at the Hotel Bagni Nuovi—in its beautiful Italian garden at Bormio. All was peace and sunshine.

The phantom car had completely vanished, and they had all forgotten it except Fritz, who was haunted by the weird face with the goggles staring at him over its own shoulder.

## II

Goritzki and Nepomuc, who had not stopped at either Ferdinandshöhe, or Bormio for refreshment, were comfortably housed at Tirano long before sunset. They had eaten a few sandwiches at the Cantina on the Italian side, where the car was obliged to pause a moment for the Italian custom-house formalities, and Nepomuc had enjoyed a bottle of beer. Goritzki had swallowed a glass of water and then taken a long pull at his flask. Nepomuc was very uncomfortable, as any one might have been; at the mercy of a chauffeur as to whose sobriety one may be entertaining some doubt: and on such a road!

Goritzki, however, had managed his car with his usual skill, down the amazing zigzags that swung

below them, making each sharp turn like an artist, although he swore over the hard work. Farther on the motor slipped easily down, along the edge of a deep gorge, where a torrent foams and roars, fed by a wide cascade that slides down the cliff in a series of high steps that look as though hewn in a wall of rock, like the staircase of a giant's castle.

The whole valley seems like a great and unfinished convulsion of Nature, still apparently heaving and nowhere quite still; for the steep cliffs are composed of thin layers of alternate strata, yellow and tawny and dark brown, with none of the parallel stripes horizontal — all running obliquely or else rippling like the surface of a wind-swept lake: and in one huge pile of rock far above and away on the right, the stripes terminate quite abruptly at the top where the mountain crest cuts clear, against the deep blue sky.

The nearer mountains on the opposite side of the gorge look like huge fortresses of departed giants. They rise in immense donjon towers, against whose yellow walls, far up, black splashes curl downwards, seeming to drip over the upper edge, as though the defending giants had dropped burning pitch upon the heads of the assailing Titans.

This scene had its effect upon the elfish spirit of Nepomuc, who edged closer to Goritzki, especially when the car roared, through the dark and dripping

caverns of galleries tunneled in the solid rock at intervals, as a refuge from avalanches.

"Erlaucht," he began at last timidly, after the car began to slide downward easily along the mountainside by its own impetus, and Goritzki's grip on the wheel had relaxed. They had just turned the corner at the end of the gorge, and Italy smiled at them from the valley below, where green fields lay and peaceful streams flowed smoothly. Beyond, near the horizon, was a range of soft blue mountains with a village here and there, clear and white in the light of a blazing June sun.

"Erlaucht," pursued Nepomuc, "may I say that I thought you meant to keep *behind* the carriage (as we had done behind the Princess's automobile, for the past two days since Innsbruck)?"

"I did 'mean to do it,' Nepomuc; but the temptation was too much for me."

"The Erlaucht did not wish to cause an accident —"

"Forty years ago, Nepomuc, at that very spot where I put on speed, a Belgian named Tourville threw his wife, an Englishwoman (she had money and he was hard up)—over the cliff. A tablet marks the exact place, which your sharp eyes might have noticed, though you would not have had time to read the whole inscription." Goritzki spoke quietly in his usual tone, but his eyelids under the goggles were twitching nervously.

Nepomuc shuddered; then he found courage to say, "But surely, the Erlauch did not wish so dreadful an accident to happen again?"

Goritzki muttered under his breath in French: "You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs." Then aloud, he answered impatiently, "I have told you that the temptation came to me suddenly. In the twinkling of an eye, a thought flashed through my brain: 'That Belgian was a bungler, and automobiles had not been invented forty years ago.' Tourville, unpardonably, let himself be found out. Nowadays, one can commit almost any crime in or by a motor-car, and afterward escape scot-free. That celebrated gang in Paris, last year, was clever and audacious, and they might have retired in affluence after their first successes; but, like so many people at Monte Carlo, they did not know when to stop."

Goritzki said no more, and Nepomuc did not dare to address him again.

### III

Goritzki had announced at Greifenstein his intention to drive his big open car himself, accompanied by Nepomuc, to Turin, where he was going to leave it; the Fiat Company having promised to allow him something for it and to have a new landaulette ready in October, in which he should travel from Venice to Monte Carlo.

Goritzki had also told Johann Swoboda that he intended to go from Turin to Ouchy for a week, to see some friends at the Hotel Beau Rivage, and expected the servants to be in Venice with everything in readiness at the Palazetto about the twenty-first of June. He was very exact about the dates. He left Greifenstein on the eighth, early in the morning, having been warned by Nepomuc that the Princess Olga's limousine was to leave the Goldene Sonne at Innsbruck on that same day. Like a sleuth-hound, Goritzki had followed them, first to Meran, then to Trafoi, and to-day he had passed their carriage on the Stelvio, with the devil in his heart.

Goritzki loved to drive his car himself. He was reckless, but very skillful with his artist's hands. He loved to feel, too, that he could even dominate this creature of steel and iron. "I can make her sing," he used to boast.

But to-day, Goritzki was fagged out. He had eaten scarcely anything since breakfast, but he went straight to his bedroom, where he ordered only tea and toast. Nepomuc regaled himself profusely in the *Salle des Couriers* on sausages and beer. He had just finished, when he was summoned to his master's room.

Nepomuc found Goritzki lying in bed with a tray on the table within reach, containing the remains of a *thé complet*, and beside it lay Goritzki's flask. He



was very pale, and there were purple rings about his twitching eyelids.

"I am nearly dead beat," he said, and his voice sounded husky.

"Erlaucht," Nepomuc pleaded, "leave the car here and take the train to-morrow. You can arrange here at Tirano to have some one drive it to Turin, or, if you will not trust a hired chauffeur, you might send to Greifenstein for Oswald."

"Don't bother me! Because I call you a confidential servant, Nepomuc, is no good reason for you to forget who I am and who you are. Now listen to me. I have come to the verge of utter ruin, and there is no escape for me; no escape (do you hear?)—*but by one way*. It is the way out of all my difficulties, the only way to a sure future. Do you hear?" Goritzki repeated.

"Yes, Herr Graf!"

"You are the only person who can make all this bright future possible for me; you who are responsible for the whole catastrophe!"

"I?"

"Yes, you, with your infernal mistake about that paper."

"Erlaucht, if ever the Devil in person—"

"Oh, hold your tongue, you fool! I am tired of hearing you say that. That paper is the proof of your blunder. Don't put it on the Devil." Goritzki sat up in bed. "Now, listen. I am going

to ask of you something which they say in English is not so bad as a blunder."

"What is that, Erlaucht?"

"It is called a crime," answered Goritzki, laughing.

Nepomuc racked his brain. "Is it to steal the right paper?" he asked, "or is it to kidnap the young Countess?"

"Nothing so fantastic or so futile. That document was left in Vienna in the hands of a lawyer (you found that out very cleverly), and it would be produced at once were I such a fool as to abduct my daughter. Don't try to cudgel your idiot's brain — all I wish to say to you now is, that *I depend upon you*, and that you shall have fifty thousand crowns if the thing is well done."

Nepomuc's green eyes gleamed. (Goritzki noticed it.) "I will do anything you wish, Erlaucht," he exclaimed and kissed his master's hand.

Goritzki drew it away, and wiped it on the sheet, "Pah!" he said, "it smells of garlic."

"It is only a sausage, Erlaucht," faltered the abashed Nepomuc.

"Now that matter is settled," said his master, "and we won't talk about it again until the time comes. From Turin we shall go to Stresa on Lago Maggiore, so as not to be too near the Villa Bardi, and on the main line to Switzerland through the Simplon tunnel. I will remain there for some

days while you make reconnaissances at Lake Como (at the Villa Bardi), and report to me exactly how things are. After the blow has been struck —”

“ The blow struck, Erlaucht? ”

“ I mean the *coup*,” replied Goritzki, “ the *stroke of fortune*.”

“ Yes, Erlaucht.”

“ After that, you go to Genoa and sail on the 21st for America, and I go to Venice.”

## CHAPTER XXXIV

**I**T was the seventeenth of June. Leonora was sitting under the trees, which hid her completely from the villa and bordered the terrace that looked out upon the lake. She loved its seclusion, and spent hours there undisturbed nearly every morning, while Bianca and the Princess went out on various excursions in the mountains or on the lake, sometimes for all the day, but usually returning for a midday breakfast. Until she was summoned to this meal, nobody came near her after the morning mail had been brought to her in the garden at nine o'clock by Fritz.

Leonora breakfasted at half-past seven every day with the more active Princess and Bianca, and then came out at once with her books and a portfolio and her work-bag.

Nepomuc had found out all this during the first few days of his stay at Lake Como. He had taken a room at the Stella, a very modest inn at Cernobbio near by.

On this special morning, the air was hot and sultry, and the lake seemed like a sheet of brass. Leonora leant back in a low wicker chair with a

chintz cushion behind her uncovered head. The leaves of an acacia-tree threw a light and flickering shadow upon her uplifted face. She was fast asleep. Her curved pink lips were parted in a smile, and the delicate violet eyelids lay without a quiver over her hazel eyes, trailing their black lashes, which were in striking contrast to the light-brown eyebrows so softly definite, and the still lighter brown of her hair that rippled back from her brow and was twined in a knot rather high upon her head. Her skin was without a flaw, pale white, with a faint pink flush in the lobes of her ears, and on her slightly hollow cheeks. She had grown very thin, but it did not make her look older, rather the reverse, like a tired child recovering from an illness. On each pink ear reposed a magnificent pearl, as though lying on a sea-shell.

Leonora loved these ear-rings, and she wore them often, even in the summer mornings, because she said pearls are alive and, like chameleons, require sunshine and air to feed upon. They would die if they only had darkness or the unhealthy glare of a theatre or a ballroom. So Leonora wore them often, as well as a string of pearls that matched them in size and lustre.

The necklace was clasped about her white neck on this morning, and it rose and fell with her soft and regular breathing. A few birds, who did not seem to mind the heat, were twittering in the bushes,

but they did not disturb her sleep. Neither did she stir when a black figure raised itself from the right-hand end of the terrace, where the wall was cleft to allow a flight of stone steps to descend to the water where the boats were moored or lay on a strip of sand.

This figure was thin and absolutely noiseless, as it wriggled itself snake-like along the terrace, keeping low enough to be out of sight should she open her eyes. But Leonora slept on.

Nepomuc crawled until he got within a few feet of the garden-chair, and then he suddenly reared himself like a snake about to strike, casting a sharp glance of hatred at Leonora's face, his chin thrust forward and his hands hanging by his sides. He had quite forgotten how the Countess Goritzka looked, and he never before had seen "La Bardi" so near. Only once from the upper gallery in Munich he had seen her as Desdemona, brilliant and wonderful, and then he had hated her and was glad when Othello smothered her at the end. Now he gazed close at this marvellous face, asleep and innocent as a child's. Nepomuc lost his breath in admiration. He could have knelt in prayer to her, as he had to the Blessed Virgin's statue in the chapel when he was a little bit of a boy, before the Herr Graf destroyed it.

Nepomuc had been told about that act of vandalism, but he knew also that Goritzki sometimes was

made mad by drink (as he feared was the case now). A great nobleman has a right to amuse himself as he pleases. It was not his place to criticise his master.

For fully five minutes, Nepomuc stood spellbound gazing at Leonora, and Leonora slept on peacefully. Then without noise the snake-man slipped away, and the small canoe in which he had come slid empty over the glass surface of the water, a black head and uplifted arm alone being visible above the ripples in its wake.

Nepomuc, who was dressed in his black "tricot complet," and whose coat, trousers and shoes lay on the seat, swam behind, pushing the light canoe. He returned to Cernobbio half an hour later, dressed and carrying the dripping *tricot*. "I've had a famous bath," he said, as he paid the boatman; "I will go out again to-morrow morning about this time."

Goritzki had been two days at Stresa, coming up from Turin, and had met several friends. They noticed, however (and remembered afterwards), that he had appeared to be very moody and unlike his usual self. They feared that he was drinking in solitude, as he always stayed in his room every night.

On this night of the seventeenth of June, Goritzki had seemed rather livelier. He had gone on the lake with a gay party, returning at ten o'clock.

"I am going to-morrow morning to Ouchy to stay over Sunday at the Beau Rivage with the Gagliardis, who were with me at Greifenstein at Easter. I shall be back here the night of the twentieth. It will be my birthday. Let us have a celebration in honor of the occasion — a late champagne supper. The train gets here a little before nine, and we'll make it a *nuit blanche*. I am off to Venice the next day."

The friends replied that they would be charmed.

Goritzki went upstairs and sent for Nepomuc, who had arrived at the hotel for supper, bag and baggage, from Cernobbio. Nepomuc found his master seated by a table on which lay a leather despatch box open, and some writing materials. Goritzki did not seem to have been drinking. His face was pale, his black eyes glittered; his mouth and chin looked set and determined.

"We have no time to waste now," he said sternly. "Sit down."

Nepomuc took a chair and slid into it, his green eyes rivetted on his master. He was evidently frightened; but he also looked determined. It was the same look that he had at the circus, when he was hanging head downward from one fast-swinging trapeze and preparing to leap and catch another one — a look that faces death, but feels sure of the skill to avoid it.

"Did you go again to the village to-day?"



"Yes, Erlaucht, and I went nearer than ever before. The Signora was asleep, sitting in a low chair. I went within a foot of her."

"What did she have on?" asked Goritzki.

Nepomuc looked surprised. "She was dressed in a white dress open at the throat, Herr Graf, with —"

Goritzki laughed. "You fool, I don't want a fashion report. What jewels did she wear?"

"Magnificent pearls, Erlaucht, ear-rings and a necklace."

Goritzki threw back his head and shouted with laughter. "Better and better," he cried, and then in a low, distinct voice, inaudible outside of the room: "The 'pearls of great price,'" he said slowly, looking hard at Nepomuc. "And she has worn them every day? You are sure of that?"

"Every day, Erlaucht. I could see them from behind the wall."

"And she is alone always from nine to twelve?"

"She has been all the week."

"Good," said Goritzki, and he took from the despatch-box a small morocco-case. It was one in which he had been used to carry scarf-pins and buttons. But there was nothing inside of it now except a little tool, pointed and sharp, like a carpenter's awl. Goritzki took it out and tested the point with his finger. He smiled. Then he fixed his eyes

again upon Nepomuc and advanced his chair until their knees touched.

"Nepomuc Swoboda, you have sworn to do something which will assure my future, and I have sworn to give you fifty thousand crowns for the service rendered. Is that understood?"

"It is, Herr Graf," Nepomuc's heart was in his mouth, but he mastered himself, thinking of the fifty thousand crowns.

Goritzki held up the little pointed tool. "A weapon like this," he said, "was used by an Italian, Lucchesi, to let out the life of an Empress."

Nepomuc gasped like a fish out of water, and his green eyes seemed glazed; but he never took them off his master, and he was speechless.

"It is quite painless," continued Goritzki. "The Empress did not even know she was stabbed, although she died of the wound. It was almost bloodless and scarcely visible."

"You would kill the Countess, your wife?" Nepomuc found words to say.

"There are precedents," Goritzki answered. "My good Nepomuc," he added, "I told you of the tablet in memory of Madeline Tourville on the Stelvio. You have doubtless heard of the killing, here on Lake Como, of his wife by a young American only a few years ago. He was clumsy about the body and tried to hide it in the lake, if you remember."

"But, Erlaucht, you would not —"

"Oh, no, Nepomuc, *I* don't mean to do the deed. *You* are going to attend to that. I can trust to your skill. This," said Goritzki, looking straight into Nepomuc's eyes, "is the *coup* I spoke of; the stroke of fortune *for us both!*"

He waited a moment. Nepomuc was still speechless.

"Well!" exclaimed Goritzki impatiently. "If you are chicken-hearted, if you want to back out, I swear by all that you may hold sacred, *I* will strike the blow myself!"

He rose from the chair with blazing eyes, and stood before Nepomuc, the glancing steel held high in his uplifted right hand.

Nepomuc knew that Goritzki meant what he said. He knew that with all the information which he had acquired, Goritzki could accomplish everything as noiselessly and easily as Nepomuc himself and would also have the three hours necessary for flight before the discovery could be made. Never had Nepomuc faced such a situation, even when hanging by his heels while a crowd held its breath and watched him.

His nerve did not desert him now. "Erlaucht, I will do your bidding," he said quietly.

Goritzki was enchanted with his own powers of persuasion and believed that the fifty thousand crowns must also be a potent influence with Nepomuc.

"You will never be suspected at all," he explained. "You will be sailing from Genoa the very next day or the day after that; and as for me — *I* (whom suspicion might dare to assail) shall have *an alibi* at Ouchy. I have arranged all that beforehand, knowing your loyalty."

Goritzki went on to explain that on the next Monday, the 20th of June (his birthday, he remarked), he would be returning from Ouchy by the late afternoon train, and that on that same Monday morning Nepomuc should repair to the garden, this time by land, hiring no boat, should slip over the high wall (an easy task for him, but impossible for an ordinary human being) and going up behind the unsuspecting Leonora, that he should stab her, asleep or awake. "Just one sharp thrust — it will be painless," Goritzki said.

Nepomuc did not blench. He seemed to have made up his mind.

"When I was so pleased about the pearls," said Goritzki, "it was because I wish everybody to believe that the deed was done for robbery. That will throw everybody off the scent. Those pearls, my dear Nepomuc," he added, with glittering eyes, "are worth five hundred thousand crowns! See how I trust you. You yourself shall carry them to America, no custom-house officer would suspect you, even if he had a right to interfere with a foreign artist. They will be perfectly safe with you, and

you can easily dispose of one at a time, here and there, while you are in America, and remit to me the money. After you come back, for years you can keep on doing this work for me; in Paris, in London, in Vienna; one at a time. They are beautiful pearls, but not so magnificent as to be identified, unstrung. You shall have a percentage also on the pearls; as my agent, eh?"

"It shall be done," answered Nepomuc.

Goritzki looked at him almost with disgust. He had expected some protest at first. This greed of gain was repulsive on the part of the Snake-Man, and scarcely mitigated by his slavish devotion to his master.

So thought Goritzki as he left for Ouchy the next morning. He could not see Nepomuc (sitting in his room an hour later at the hotel), with his arms outstretched upon the table, the sharp tool lying in its case between them, crying as if his heart would break.

The Snake-Man had come to a fixed determination. He would go through the tunnel to Brigue on Monday, just in time to catch Goritzki's train. He would try to see him alone, and would tell him that the *coup* had not been struck, and he would implore his master to give up this mad scheme. "For mad he is, I know it," wept Nepomuc. "He always was kind. He would not *kill* anything. He never even

cared for sport. He sang and played beautiful music. He is not a murderer, my master!"

Then Nepomuc arose and dried his eyes. He picked up the morocco case, opened it, and eyed the little sharp steel tool within. Then he closed the case with a snap, and was about to put it into his pocket, when a sudden temptation assailed him — Why not obey his master? Why not be rich himself, and help his idol to freedom and happiness? The Herr Graf was right. It would be quite *safe* — no possibility of even suspicion. And as to La Bardi? The Herr Graf had said it would be absolutely painless. Nepomuc took out the little awl and softly felt the point.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### I

**T**HE express train bound for Milan stopped at Brigue for a few minutes. Goritzki got out to stretch his legs and going to the book-stall, bought an Italian newspaper. Night was falling as the train started, and Brigue, with its noise and dust and smoke, seemed more slate-coloured and gloomy than usual.

About a mile farther on, the gaping cavern of the Simplon tunnel showed dimly in the sombre mountainside, like the opening of some monstrous dragon's lair. Here the train halted to exchange its smoke-belching locomotive for one of the electric engines which ply back and forth in the tunnel, keeping it free from noxious gases and coal-dust. Goritzki grinned as he read in the society column of the *Corriere de la Sera* that "The Signora Leonora Bardi (Comtessa Goritzka) arrived last week at her villa on the Lake Como, where she will remain through the summer. The Signora has enjoyed her winter in Egypt and is quite restored to health."

Goritzki's black eyes gleamed venomously and

the waxed ends of his moustache bristled like the whiskers of a tiger-cat. He did indeed look like a madman.

"We shall see how long she *will remain* at the Villa Bardi. I ought to have news to-night," he hissed between his set teeth. He threw down the paper after a moment and glanced about him. The electric lights were blazing merrily, and outside in the tunnel a thick white mist had gathered and was spreading its sticky veil over the glass of the window. Goritzki noticed that the latter was open at the top and fastened by the usual leather strap to a brass knob below.

He was beginning to think of shutting it on account of the intense heat in the tunnel, but he had locked the door into the corridor outside in the hope of preventing any possible intrusion at Brigue, and had also drawn the curtain over the glass windows on that side to exclude observation, so there was no draught at all between the window and the corridor, and he let it be.

The conductor had already looked at Goritzki's tickets, and for a *douceur*, slipped into his hand, had promised to see that the traveller should be undisturbed as far as Stresa, where he meant to alight. In the rack above Goritzki's head was a large valise and a smaller bag; other luggage he had none. He leaned back, shut his eyes and began to think.

"Nepomuc should have got my wire three days



ago. The chance to finish his work must have come surely early this morning. I ought to get word at Stresa, where I wrote to him I should stay to-night, that it is all over; or perhaps I shall find Nepomuc himself waiting for me there."

Goritzki uttered a sigh of obvious satisfaction. "If Nepomuc manages the thing adroitly there will not even be a suspicion of foul play. My alibi (the only person who could profit by it) is proven already and none but faithful servants surround the 'Diva.'"

The train had been now five minutes in the tunnel, and a strange thing happened. Goritzki, opening his eyes (which he had shut in meditation), became aware of two eyes gazing through the narrow slit of the open window. Below it the opaque mist on the glass hid all else from view. These eyes were intently fastened upon him and Goritzki perceived also the tips of three slim yellow fingers hooked on either side above the sash of the window. As he started to his feet, still gazing at the opening, the face came nearer, filling the space, and he recognised to his relief the features of Nepomuc, the Snake-Man.

"What the devil are you doing here?" asked the startled Goritzki, "and how the devil did you get here?"

"That is very simple," answered Nepomuc, putting his narrow head sideways half through the

small aperture. "I took a train this afternoon that reached Brigue just half an hour before yours arrived."

"Why the devil have you come here instead of waiting for me at Stresa?"

"I preferred to come to Brigue in order to have a talk with you on the train before reaching Stresa," replied Nepomuc, "and as you have locked the door of your compartment, I thought I would come this way."

"But you can't get in unless I open the window," said Goritzki approaching nearer.

"That is an old trick," responded the Snake-Man, waving him aside. "I have done it many a time through a round hoop. This shape is easier."

Drawing back his head and twisting himself about in the darkness, Nepomuc suddenly shot two arms through the narrow opening above the window; two arms so near together that they touched. The hands shot upwards, their backs toward Goritzki, who watched, holding his breath and grinning ferociously. He would have been equally pleased to have seen either the success or the failure of the amazing "trick," for Goritzki believed that the deed was already done and that the Snake-Man had taken this fantastic means of bringing the tidings.

In Goritzki's opinion it might, therefore, be even better for himself that the bearer of this news should fall a mangled corpse in the Simplon tunnel, and

prevent future possible inconvenience. The Snake-Man would get a large reward now but he might become impecunious later and bothersome. These thoughts flashed in a second through Goritzki's alert brain as he stood waiting and offering no helping hand. But in two seconds more Nepomuc, grasping the projecting frame above the window with his sinuous hands, drew first his head sideways and then his boneless body and jointless legs through the open space, and dropped lightly to the floor, turning about as he came down. Then, facing Goritzki, Nepomuc made his professional bow with a wave of both arms and stood still. The train had now been fifteen minutes in the tunnel.

"Stop your tricks and answer me!" cried Goritzki, stamping his foot and stepping backward toward the door so as to keep some distance between his nobility and the contortionist, who certainly looked slovenly, clad in a Jaeger undershirt, a black knitted *culotte* and long yarn stockings. He was shoeless.

"Is it all over?" asked Goritzki eagerly, his lips stretched tight over his sharp white teeth. Nepomuc drew a long breath and seemed to elongate his snake-like body. His head was held higher than the Count's, and his strange face, with its thin wide mouth and long green eyes, showed a passing gleam of beauty, such as he might have had when

a little tow-headed child swinging from the trees at Greifenstein.

"It is *not* all over," he said distinctly through scarcely parted lips. "It is not all over and never shall be for me."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, Herr Graf, that I came very near — that I almost decided to do your will, but, somehow, I could not do it — kill the beautiful Frau Gräfin! That devilish point of steel, I threw it into the lake — That is why I am here!"

"You dog!" cried Goritzki, springing toward him. "You fool! Has she bewitched you too?"

"Master!" cried Nepomuc, stretching out his hands and backing against the window. "Master, for God's sake, give it up! I came here to implore you. I have lied for you — I have stolen for you; but I will not *kill*. And oh, for God's sake, give it up. Don't do it *yourself*!"

"You treacherous hound!" gasped Goritzki beside himself. "Your carcass shall be found smashed upon the rocks in the tunnel and nobody be any the wiser. I could shoot you here on this spot like a dog," and he tapped the breast-pocket of his coat where a revolver was always ready, "but then there would be noise and a fuss."

"Two can play at that game!" cried Nepomuc, his mouth stiffening and with a dangerous gleam in

his eyes as Goritzki advanced upon him. The two men rushed together, rocking to and fro, with the shaking of the train and their own struggles. Goritzki grappled with Nepomuc, striving to twist him about, and slip the leather strap of the window from the brass knob, that the sash might fall open and make it easy for him to lift the light weight of the acrobat and fling him backwards into the darkness.

The train had passed the half-way halt with its lights and the glimpse of men, naked to the waist, seated at a table in the signal station. All this had flashed by in the twinkling of an eye and the gloom fell again. The mouth of the tunnel on the Italian side was five minutes away. Goritzki had the advantage of strength but he could not count upon the fantastic twists of his adversary who twined his legs and arms about him like a grape-vine round an oak tree. After three minutes Goritzki with a muttered oath, snatched the pistol from his pocket, having managed to free his right hand for an instant. A shot rang out, sharp and dry, just loud enough to break across the other noises.

## II

Out from the gaping mouth of the tunnel rushed the train into the deep blue Italian twilight where the stars were coming out one by one, the big ones first and the little ones not yet. The conductor

came running back through the corridor as the train stopped. A gentleman and a lady with a large hat and feather were standing at the open door of the compartment next to Goritzki.

"Did you hear a shot?" asked the conductor.

"In there," answered the man.

The conductor tried the door. It was locked. After summoning help at the station and five minutes' exertion, the door was forced open and Goritzki was found lying dead, shot through the heart. A pistol lay on the floor, some distance from the dead man who had evidently fallen backward upon the seat. The traveller in the next compartment proved to be an English doctor of distinction going with his wife for a holiday to Italy. He knelt down and examined the body after the coat and waistcoat were removed.

"The ball has entered the left breast about two inches above the ribs, going downward through the heart," he announced in English, which none of the officials could understand. Turning the body over the doctor pointed, however, to a red spot above the left hip. "It came out down below; right here," he observed, touching the wound, and looking up convincingly over his gold eye-glasses, at the conductor and his two assistants. "Don't you see it can't be suicide?" he added. The last word was understood by the conductor.

"*Oui, oui,*" he exclaimed, "*c'est un suicide.*"

"No, no," protested the Englishman rising to his feet. "He could not have done it himself! I tell you, it is quite impossible."

The conductor laid the body gently back upon the seat, face upwards.

He then beckoned the doctor to come out in the corridor. First he showed him the door which had been fast bolted from within.

"You have noticed this fact yourself, sir," he said, and then leading the Englishman carefully back again into the compartment where the dead man lay, he pointed to the window, open at the top only a few inches, and at the leather strap fastened tight over the brass knob. The doctor observed this in silence and then he whistled.

"I have nothing more to say," he remarked afterward to his wife who had stayed in the adjoining compartment to avoid the horror next door. "I would have sworn in any court of justice that such a wound could not have been self-inflicted. However, there it is. There was no possible chance that anybody could have got inside of a door tight locked, or through a slit of about six inches open at the top of the window. Besides, the man was not robbed. They found a lot of money and a watch-chain, sleeve buttons and scarf-pin, all of which have been carefully preserved by the conductor and at Domodossola the whole thing will be looked into. Thank goodness, they say we can go on, as I did

not discover the body and they will get another doctor to examine it. It beats me!"

At Domodossola a litter was procured and the body of Goritzki placed upon it, covered with his overcoat and a heavy canvas shrouding. The whole burden was transported from the train to a large wagon, accompanied by the conductor whose place on the train had been taken by a substitute. The names and addresses of all the passengers were recorded in case their testimony might be needed. These were sixteen in all; four men in the smoking carriage; three single women in the "dames seules," and four couples, including the English doctor and his wife, all of whom thought they had heard a shot. The sixteenth passenger was a very thin young man wrapped in a large black Austrian *Loden-mantel*, who had boarded the train at Brigue and whose ticket the conductor remembered to have punched just before entering the tunnel as he was the only new passenger.

This young man had been seen by two of the other passengers, to come out of the "toilette" just as the train emerged from the tunnel. He claimed that he was in the "toilette" at the time of the shooting and had heard nothing whatever.

"I was washing," he said, "and besides, as the window was open, the noise outside would have prevented me from hearing any other sound whatever."

Clearly there was absolutely no possibility of any-



thing but suicide. No human being could have got into the compartment where Goritzki lay dead. (This was the verdict three days later.)

At Stresa five passengers alighted, two couples and a solitary man. It was now quite dark. The omnibuses rattled away from the station as the train moved on and the silence of night settled down again. The thin young man walked alone through the darkness, drawing his cloak close about his narrow shoulders. He carried a small bag and an umbrella.

“Thank God, I did not harm her, and God have mercy on the Erlaucht’s soul!” he said to himself with a shiver.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

**H**ILDA Brinkmeyer and Theodora Haines were seated in their apartment at Claridge's. They had read of Goritzki's death in the *Times* three days before. Hilda's eyes were red with weeping. In spite of all that had happened to shake her affection, she felt sorry, very sorry.

"He killed himself because he could not marry me. Don't you think so, Theodora?"

"Undoubtedly!" exclaimed Mrs. Haines with a covert sneer.

Hilda waited a moment. "Theodora dear, I had already made up my mind to marry Lord Rivers; but I do wish he were not so fat."

"Take him every year for a 'cure' to Marienbad," was Mrs. Haines' advice. Hilda brightened up.

"I will do that," she said, "and we shall meet the very nicest people."

"Oh, you will be on top *now* everywhere, right enough," said Theodora Haines. "There won't be any more question about 'Hof-fag' and all that nonsense that they have at the Vienna Court. Old England is all right. But," she added, looking side-

ways at Hilda, "you will not want a chaperon any more."

"I shall always want a friend, Theodora dear," cried Hilda, kissing her; and Theodora Haines was quite satisfied.

"She'll not get rid of me," she said to herself, "she and her 'belted Earl.'"

Goritzki's body was taken by Prince Ernest Greifenstein to Galicia and was buried in the family vault beside his father and mother. "Accidental death" had been the verdict. There was a requiem mass and on that same day at Bellaggio a mass for the dead was celebrated, the Princess Olga and Leonora and Bianca attending, dressed in black.

"It is seemly," said the Princess.

"I will wear it if you wish," said Leonora to Bianca.

"Mamma dear, I think we ought to," responded Bianca, and that night she whispered to her mother, "Mamma, perhaps he was repentant and he was coming to see us."

"Perhaps, dear," answered Leonora wearily, but she did not believe it. However, she did think that Goritzki might have suddenly gone mad with remorse and killed himself, and she could not get rid of the thought that perhaps she might have prevented it. The Princess took off her black in a month; she could not bear it; and so did Leonora and Bianca before they all went to Florence in No-

vember, for there it would have caused comment and seemed conspicuous.

They all three settled down to a quiet life until Christmas should come, when they would all go to Vienna and Bianca was to be presented at the Court ball. The Princess Olga was delighted over the preparations, much more interested than Leonora, who began to feel that she herself had said farewell to life when La Bardi quitted the stage.

Her two best friends seemed to have failed her. Lord Arthur St. John (who had emerged from Africa and been named first Secretary at St. Petersburg) had written to her very soon after Goritzki's death, offering his hand and heart, which Leonora had promptly and rather brusquely refused.

"It seems perfunctory," she had said to her aunt.

"He could not have done it *before*," rejoined the Princess raising her eyebrows.

"It seems as if he had cared more for me on the stage than off," Leonora complained. She had resented a letter received in Egypt the winter before remonstrating with her for having "put out her light" and left the world darker for its absence.

"I dare say he did; so did many thousand other people," rejoined the Princess.

Then there was Reginal Grafton. He had written once after "Mrs. Jimmy Blake's" death, a nice long letter, but since Goritzki's tragic end, he had written nothing but stiff and formal notes as if some

coolness had come between them, some icy barrier incomprehensible.

Florence wrote often to Bianca, but said little about her father, except that they were very happy together, and "good comrades." However, Leonora made up her mind to be contented in the tranquil life she had chosen and gradually her soul found peace and rest.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

**A** YEAR had passed since Goritzki's death and the trees and flowers at the Villa Bardi seemed to wear exactly the same leaves and blooms as in the June of twelve months ago. Nature is unchanging in a world which human nature finds so varied and tormenting.

The year had been, after all, one of peace and rest to Leonora, and of joy to the Princess Olga and Bianca. The three had been always united, in Styria, in Vienna and now again on Lake Como.

Bianca had been presented at Court, and Goritzki was already forgotten by society. He lay peacefully in his grave in Galicia where Bianca had supposed him to be lying for more than thirteen years. Prince Ernest Greifenstein and his mother were living at the Schloss, where already the Chapel had been restored and mass was said on every week day. The old chaplain, now seventy-five years old, came sometimes from Innsbruck to kneel there and thank God.

Leonora and Bianca meant to go some time during the summer for a visit and would pray together

in the chapel. Time and God's mercy will heal all wounds.

Breakfast was just over on this lovely June morning. They had all three taken it together in the Princess's sitting-room. She, herself, was dressed for a climb and her spiked stick stood ready in a corner by the door. Bianca was radiant in a light blue frock and a big white hat. She looked now quite grown-up, but her childlike smile and retreating chin gave her an innocent expression, in spite of her large nose. Her big, dark eyes still looked dreamy and poetic.

The Princess eyed her in fond approbation as she went to get her gloves and parasol.

"She should be married soon," was her comment.

"For pity's sake, dear aunt, leave the child with me undisturbed. You don't want to be rid of her?"

"It is not a question of being rid," declared the Princess. "She is quite grown up, and marriage is a good institution when heads and hearts can go together."

"You are still thinking of Ernest Greifenstein?"

"I am. He heads the list now. In fact, I have scratched out all the others!"

Bianca, coming in, had heard the last words.

"I am glad the others are all scratched out," she said laughing.

Tears were in Leonora's eyes. "Would you think of leaving me so soon, child?"

"Mamma, dear, he loves you too."

"How do you know?"

"He told me at the *Ball bei Hof* in February, the last time I saw him — when he told me —"

Leonora ran up to Bianca and put a hand on either shoulder, looking up into her eyes.

"You have kept a secret from me. Oh, Bianca, how *could* you?"

"Dear Mamma," said Bianca, with the poetic look in her dreamy eyes. "There are some things one cannot talk about, only pray! Besides, dear," she added briskly, kissing Leonora on both cheeks, "I told him I would tell my wonderful mother before we should go to Greifenstein this summer, and he will tell his own nice little chubby mamma. So it is all right, is not it?"

"You are so young, Bianca."

"We are going to wait a year, Mamma. He wants another year in the Navy before he will resign and take his place in the Herrenhaus."

"You have settled many things, it appears, without consulting me." Leonora's tone was bitter.

"But Mamma dear, he had told me all that long before he spoke of — of the other matter."

The Princess Olga, who had been trying to interrupt, now broke in, brandishing her spiked stick in triumph. "God bless them," she cried, "it is all



as it should be from every point of view. Two great families reunited. Her great-grandmother, and his great-grandmother were cousins, and he is a splendid fellow and a good Catholic."

"You scratched him off the list two years ago," put in Leonora.

"That was all explained last winter. I told you I have put him back, and scratched out all the others."

. . . . .  
Off went the Princess with Bianca. Leonora, left alone, cried quietly for a while in her own room. Then she bathed her eyes, and taking a white sunshade strolled slowly through the garden to her favourite bench under the trees by the lake. There were two wicker armchairs beside the bench. They all faced the water, where the stone wall ran across the garden front, with vases at regular intervals out of which bright flowers, and creeping plants were growing. Between the vases, one had glimpses of gay boats with sails or awnings, floating like swans on the breast of the lake, and above, beyond the opposite shore, arose the faint blue mountains with here and there a patch of snow. It was an ever-changing and moving picture, but it always recalled the delicate painting on old fans of the eighteenth century. Leonora herself felt as though she too belonged to a past century to-day. La Bardi was dead and buried. People, since last

year, had ceased to turn about, and nudge each other, saying, "There she is." Soon, she would be forgotten. She had flashed like a vivid comet in a murky heaven, shone for a day and vanished, never to return. The modern stage would go on dipping its feet in slime, the corruption of human nature. What she had done to raise its standard, to put what was true and just and of good report before the eyes of the people, would count for nothing. At least she thought so.

She was glad too that she had left it all behind — that stage-life — and that she had renounced the American expedition. She had laughed at the time, over a clipping from a "yellow" paper, saying that her plays were "chestnuts" and that she herself was a "back number," and that the public craved things "snappy and up-to-date," but she could not laugh to-day. It was all dead-sea fruit, a wasted life. Reginald Grafton still wrote occasionally — letters which sounded rather cold and stiff; and which she answered perfunctorily. He seemed to have gone out of her life.

And now Bianca was going out of her life too; for, after the child's marriage, nothing would ever be the same again. And her aunt? Leonora knew that no two women could be more to one another than they had been and always would be, but the Princess had so many interests in life; so many irons in the fire, that the social intercourse of every

day was limited, except in summer, to two hasty meals, and rather dull evenings, when the tired Princess nearly always went fast asleep sitting upright in her chair, often, in the middle of a sentence, waking with a start to say: "I heard what you were saying. Go on!"

All these things, sad and absurd, floated through Leonora's mind as she sat listless upon the bench, with a neglected work-bag lying beside her. The bitterest thought in her mind which had haunted her during this last year was the vague horror of Goritzki's death. Had he killed himself in a sudden fit of remorse, and was she in any degree responsible? The doubt had preyed upon her, coming at intervals, during that peaceful time, like a persistent nightmare. She could not speak of it to any one.

The Princess had told her that a pretty American widow had been (with a friend) among the guests at Greifenstein, and that Remenyi had said that Goritzki made no secret of his wish to marry her, as soon as a divorce could be got in Italy. But Remenyi was a busybody always scattering *potins* broadcast, and Leonora had kept on thinking, and worrying, her sensitive conscience harassed and uneasy. Hearing a step on the gravel of the garden-path, Leonora turned her head. Fritz was approaching with the morning mail. On the salver were two letters, one in an unknown hand from

America, the other from Saint Petersburg, and the writing was Lord Arthur's. She opened the latter first.

"DEAR SIGNORA,

"The sudden death of my father calls me back to England, and away from the diplomatic service. I write to tell you, because you are, as ever, first in my thoughts. The moth never forgets the star! I knew that there never could be any hope for me. You wrote me that nearly a year ago. I want you to know that I have become reconciled to my fate, and that I am not unhappy now. You were the dream of my youth, and I now must say, '*Adieu, ma jeunesse.*' I shall carry in my memory the wonder of you, as I saw you, on the stage, in Rome. Alas, for the whole world it will now be only a memory, since you say that you will never play again.

"It is a pity for us all, poor human creatures.

"I shall live in London now, and at Rebworth, and shall probably degenerate into that human machine, a 'peer of the realm,' a very fixed star.

"Signora, I would rather be a moth!

"Remember me most kindly to the Princess, and do let me know if you should ever come to London. You must visit my squirrel-cage."

"Mon Dieu!" thought Leonora, as she put down the young duke's letter, "what would I, a vagrant

foreigner and a Papist, have done in that squirrel-cage? England recognizes no aristocracy but the English, no Church but the Anglican. It would be as though he had married a ballet-girl; a situation unbearable for him and for me, even if I had really loved him. After all, it was La Bardi, not me, whom he loved and La Bardi, not I, who loved him! Now the duke will marry a discreet and amiable duchess, his days of romance being over, and they will live happy forever afterward."

The next letter swiftly took her mind from the Duke of Windermere. As Leonora read it, her eyes dilated with the old wild light. It was dated, "New York, June 20th," and this was its contents:

"FRAU GRÄFIN: (The letter was in German.) "You will doubtless be surprised to hear from me, but for a whole year I have been wishing to unburden my soul to the Gracious Lady, and now on the anniversary of the Erlauch's death, I have determined to speak. It is in confidence, Frau Gräfin. Only you and I must know the truth, and no other living soul." There followed a long account of all the events of the previous year, in which Nepomuc had played a conspicuous part. It ended with the tragedy in the Simplon tunnel. "Gracious Lady, when we struggled in the dark, I knew I was wrestling with a madman, and I know now that the

Erlaucht was really mad from the day when, crazed by absinthe, he had determined upon the Frau Gräfin's death. Never would he, in his sane mind, have thought of murder. My master was reckless, I know that, but how kind! He loved dogs, and he pitied the poor, and me, a little, misshapen child, he saved from misery, and made to be a healthy boy, who is now famous. I am proud of it. It is the Erlaucht's work!

"I must go back.

"As we wrestled madly together, suddenly the Herr Graf drew a pistol from his pocket, and he tried to shoot me. I struck his arm, the pistol fell just as it went off, and the barrel (while it fell) must have been discharged downward into the body of the Erlaucht.

"Gracious Lady, I did not know that my master had been shot, or I should have stayed by him, come what might. I only knew that I had saved *my* life by striking at his hand and knocking him backward.

"In the twinkling of an eye, I was out of the window, and into the lavatory.

"You know the rest.

"That is all, Gracious Lady. Upon my soul, I am innocent of my master's death, and he, too, is innocent of suicide. It was an accident, that is all. And, Frau Gräfin, I beg of you to try to be-

lieve as I do, that my master's brain was crazed, that it was not he, himself, that was so wicked, but the Devil that took possession of him!

"I have been most successful, Gnädige Frau, in this wonderful country.

"There are three enormous rings in the hippodrome, all going at once. But I may say with truth that on me all eyes are turned when I do my acts.

"I shall come back with all the money I want, and I have decided to let my joints stiffen in private life. Perhaps then will my father, in view of the success I have had and the money I have made, forgive me that I was not a rider but only a *Schlange-Mann*."

After Leonora had finished Nepomuc's letter, she tore it into little bits, and dropped the scraps of paper into the lake. A load was lifted from her heart.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

**A**S Leonora stood looking into the water, watching the minnows that swarmed about the scraps of paper, disappointed not to find the crumbs which she and Bianca scattered after tea every day, footsteps sounded on the path that led to a small door in the wall, opening directly upon the road outside. She turned about and saw Reginald Grafton advancing at a quick stride toward the bench.

"That entrance," he said, "was labelled private and *de service*. As I wanted to be seen by you alone, if possible, and as I am always in your service, I came that way."

He was trying to be cool and precise, as she could see; also, by the way he carefully leant his stick against a chair and put his hat and gloves down upon the seat, before taking the other chair for himself.

Leonora sank upon the bench in limp amazement. "Why did you not tell me?" she faltered.

"Oh, I did not mean to come," said Reginald. She could see the veins in his temples throbbing, although his face was pale and he looked cool and collected. "I have stayed away from you now for



two years, and I began to feel that we might resume our acquaintance on the bachelor uncle footing; and so I thought I would come to see you and the Princess for a few days. But last week, when I was going to write to you (we had just touched at Gibraltar on our way to Genoa) I saw something reported in the Paris *Herald* which at first made me think I would not come here at all."

"What was it?" asked Leonora. "I can't imagine. We never see the *Herald*, nor any daily papers, when we are here in the summer-time."

"It was your engagement to the new Duke of Windermere."

"Good God!" ejaculated Leonora in amazement.

"There was an announcement of his father's death," pursued Reginald hurriedly, "and then a notice of Lord Arthur St. John, his second son (whose elder brother had died last year). It spoke of his having been in the diplomatic service, and of a rumour current in St. Petersburg a year ago, at the time of Count Goritzki's death, that, after a conventional year (which could scarcely be called of mourning), the Duke would be married to La Bardi, to whom he had been conspicuously devoted in Rome a year or two before. I am telling you exactly what I read."

Leonora covered her face with her hands. "And you believed this?" she murmured.

"You had told me you loved him."

"Never!" Leonora started up and Reginald rose to his feet.

"You told me," he said quite sternly, "in Munich two years ago, that you loved a young Englishman who had gone to Africa."

Leonora sank back on the bench again, a tide of crimson dyeing her pale face. "Mon Dieu, mon Dieu!" she gasped, "I had entirely forgotten it."

Reginald looked down at her, perplexed and almost bitter. "Do you mean to say," he asked, "that you have forgotten what has haunted me day and night ever since? Was it not the truth?"

"It was folly," faltered Leonora. "My brain and my nerves were unhinged. I was dreaming strange dreams."

Reginald still looked uncompromising. "Signora," he said, "a woman must know what she is talking about (a woman like you) when she makes such a statement as that."

"God help poor women, Reginald Grafton. They sometimes don't know what they want."

The golden tones of La Bardi, the voice which had thrilled the world, had its effect in soothing Reginald Grafton. "Signora," he said in a submissive tone, "tell me the truth now. Are you not going to marry the Duke of Windermere?"

For all answer Leonora handed him an open letter. "Read that," she said.

When Reginald had read it he smiled at her more like his old self. "That is better," he remarked, "I wanted to carry away with me still a vision of you as the unattainable."

"Carry away?" repeated Leonora.

"Oh yes," hastily assented Reginald. "Did I not tell you? I left Florence in Milan at the Hotel de Paris."

"With Kate Jago?"

"No, Kate Jago is married — just before we sailed — to her Patrick. Florence and I went to the wedding and she wrote a long letter about it all, on the ship, to Bianca. She'll probably get it to-day."

"Florence is not alone?"

"Oh, no, my old uncle by marriage, Horace Parker, is with her, and her maid. To tell the truth, we came over quite suddenly — I could not stay longer on the other side — and Florence wanted so much to come. Uncle Horace wants to go to Archangel. It is a kind of pilgrimage that Bostonians love (God knows why) to make; and they talk as if it were a sort of shrine. He meant to take leave of us in Milan."

"But surely you and Florence must have intended to come here?" cried Leonora, amazed at Reginald's impetuous outpouring of words, so un-

like his usual manner and also unlike the precision of his first appearance.

Reginald looked at her steadily. "We did expect to come here," he said, "when that *Paris Herald* came on board at Gibraltar like a bird of evil omen. I said nothing to Florence about what was in it, but I decided to come here first by myself and find out about it. And if it were true, Signora, I should have flitted away with Uncle Horace to Archangel."

"But *now*?"

Reginald got up from the low wicker chair and reached a hand for his gloves and hat. Then he paused.

"Now I must say good-bye, all the same. Because," he stooped to kiss her hand, going down upon one knee in the gravel, "because," he murmured again as he pressed his lips to it, noticing how it trembled, "I can't trust myself, now that I have seen you, to assume the rôle of bachelor uncle which was prescribed for me. I must go away again, I don't care where, for another year or more. Florence may come to you, but not I."

He kissed her hand again and was about to rise when suddenly Leonora threw her soft arms about his neck.

"It is *you*!" she whispered, "and I believe it has been you all the time!"

He could not believe his ears, but when he raised

his head and looked into Leonora's face, Reginald believed his eyes.

Five minutes later the Princess Olga called out from the balcony like a muezzin, her usual announcement: "Breakfast is ready!" Then she went into the sitting-room, took off her hat, put down the spiked stick and gloves and smoothed her hair. That was a sufficient preparation for a tête-à-tête breakfast with Leonora in their unconventional summer life.

Then the Princess came out on the balcony as usual to assure herself that Leonora was coming. What did she behold? Leonora and Reginald Grafton walking slowly through the garden just in front of the round rose-bed where Leonora had once heard (as she claimed) a voice saying: "Don't go!"

They both looked up and smiled and the Princess Olga understood. She leaned over the balcony and as the two came underneath, she stretched out her hands above their heads.

"God bless you both," she said, and two tears rolled down her sun-tanned cheeks.

It was the second blessing that day and the Princess Olga was very happy. There was nothing more to wish for.

THE END

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